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SEVEN MODERN COMEDIES

By

LORD DUNSANY

AUTHOR OF "IF," ETC.

Atalanta in Wimbledon
The Raffle—The Journey of the Soul
In Holy Russia — His Sainted Grandmother
The Hopeless Passion of Mr. Bunyon
The Jest of Hahalaba

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SEVEN MODERN COMEDIES

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ATALANTA IN WIMBLEDON

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Mr. Dawk.
Marjorie Dawk.
Mr. Jinks.
Constable Spelkins.
Bill.
Mr. Leonard.

ATALANTA IN WIMBLEDON

Scene

A room in a villa, The Elms, at Wimbledon; a door opening on the street.
Marjorie Dawk *reading.*

[*Enter her father.*]

Dawk

Hullo, Marjorie! Reading?

Marjorie

Yes, father.

Dawk

Well, I never. What are you reading?

Marjorie

Morris, father.

Dawk

Morris? Morris. It conveys nothing to me, of course.

MARJORIE

Oh, I thought you knew all about him.

DAWK

You can't mean William Morris?

MARJORIE

Yes.

DAWK

Good Lord! You might as well read Tennyson.

MARJORIE

I've been reading him too.

DAWK

You reading Tennyson? Good Lord! Since when?

MARJORIE

Since yesterday. I was reading poetry most of last night.

DAWK

Poetry? What ever for?

MARJORIE

Well, you advised me to.

DAWK

Yes. But you don't take my advice, Marjorie. No, that's not the reason. You can't get away with that.

MARJORIE

Can't I?

DAWK

What's it really?

MARJORIE

Well, why did you advise me to read poetry?

DAWK

Exactly for the reason I told you. Here you are just on twenty-six, and quite presentable, and with plenty of friends. But they don't know that there's a pretty girl going about amongst them. For the simple reason that you don't convey the idea of being a girl.

MARJORIE

What then?

DAWK

A young man.

MARJORIE

I a young man?

DAWK

Yes, you smoke when they smoke, you drive their cars, you play all their games, you talk their talk, you . . . there's nothing apparently different between you and them. Of course they know you're a girl when they stop to think. Only, well, that's not the moment that a man falls in love. As I told you, you want to convey the idea that their cigarettes and motors and games are common everyday things that they can't help, but that you in your lonely tower, guarded by a dragon . . .

MARJORIE

I say, Daddy, you don't look very like a dragon.

DAWK

I don't say I do. I don't say I do. You keep me in the background. But that's the *idea.* Then they'd come tumbling over themselves to liberate you.

MARJORIE

Are you sure, Daddy?

DAWK

Well, they used to in Queen Victoria's time.

MARJORIE

Did they have dragons then?

DAWK

Well, not exactly, not exactly. But I believe they used to in King Arthur's time. And Tennyson dished it all up again for them, sort of rehashed it, as it were. You see, he sort of made the Prince Consort into King Arthur, and then of course the effect spread right downwards. Nowadays . . . but it's no use; you won't take my advice.

MARJORIE

I have taken it. I've been reading poetry for two days.

DAWK

Well, I'm glad to see it. After all, you're twenty-six now; and the motoring and the cigarettes don't seem to have led to anything. I should try the poetry.

MARJORIE

I have. And what is more, I have acted on it.

DAWK

You've acted on it?

MARJORIE

Yes, Daddy, I was desperate.

DAWK

What do you mean?

MARJORIE

Well, I may as well tell you, Daddy. After all, we don't hush it all up nowadays like yon embalméd rose, or whatever it is that holds the world's record for silence. I may as well tell you. It's like this.

DAWK

Yes?

MARJORIE

Well, Bill, you know. I've seen a good deal more of Bill than the rest. More motors and cigarettes, as you'd put it. And we were pals. I liked the way he drove, and the things he said. I liked his point of view. Of course it would only sound silly to you, but I liked it. And we like the same movie-shows. Of course I know they're a depraving influence, Daddy. But they used to deprave Bill and me in just the same way. And, oh, there were a lot of things I liked about him. And, well, that's all.

DAWK

That's all?

MARJORIE

Yes.

DAWK

You mean it went no further.

MARJORIE

It means I was a mug, Daddy, in ever thinking it would. And everything you've said about me was right. And I'm going to chuck it all, cigarettes, motors, and everything, and I've taken to poetry as you said.

DAWK

Well, er, perhaps you are right.

MARJORIE

And I've acted on it.

DAWK

Acted on it? On what?

MARJORIE

On William Morris.

[DAWK, *brooding, has turned to walk about the room thoughtfully. He comes upon the great sword with the point on floor, resting against the wall and wreathed with dandelions.*]

DAWK

Hullo! What did you take this old thing out of my study for?

MARJORIE

That's part of it.

DAWK

Part of what?

MARJORIE

Part of what I got out of William Morris.

DAWK

Good Lord. Well, you mustn't hurt it. It's a fine old sword.

MARJORIE

I've only been sharpening it.

DAWK

Sharpening it?

MARJORIE

Yes, all the morning.

DAWK

What ever for?

MARJORIE

Well, I told you I've been reading poetry, and that I've acted on it. It doesn't seem much good if you can't.

DAWK

But how?

MARJORIE

And I told you I was desperate, Daddy. Well, I put an advertisement in the *Morning Post.*

DAWK

In the *Morning Post?*

MARJORIE

Yes. I 'phoned it up to them yesterday. The idea's out of William Morris.

DAWK

The *Morning Post?* Let me see [*She hands it to him.*] Let me see.

MARJORIE

The front page.

DAWK

The *front* page, did you say? What's it all about?

MARJORIE [*very, very miserably*]

It's time I was married now.

DAWK

Why, Marjorie, cheer up. What's this advertisement about?

MARJORIE

You've got it there. [*Knock on door. Sadly.*] Come in.

[*Enter* JINKS, *a young man.*]

JINKS

Oh, how do you do?

MARJORIE

How do you do?

JINKS

Very nice weather for the time of year, isn't it?

MARJORIE

Yes.

JINKS

Very nice.

MARJORIE

You've come about an advertisement in the *Morning Post?*

JINKS

Yes.

DAWK

The advertisement? What is it?

MARJORIE

All right, Daddy. Let me just. . . . You've got it there.

DAWK

Well, really, I don't know. The front page, you said. Let me see.

MARJORIE

You've come to play?

JINKS

Yes.

MARJORIE

On my terms?

JINKS

Certainly.

MARJORIE

They may seem hard to you, but . . .

JINKS

Not at all.

MARJORIE

But I was probably feeling pretty desperate when I made them.

JINKS

Don't mention it.

MARJORIE

And now they're made I abide by them.

JINKS

Certainly, miss.

MARJORIE

Well, our ping-pong room is there.

JINKS

Thank you.

MARJORIE

And, I've warned you.

JINKS

I think it's only fair to say, miss; I really feel that it's only right to tell you, even if it should chance to sound a little boastful.

MARJORIE

Yes?

JINKS

Well, I, I am, I mean I am the champion of Surrey.

MARJORIE

Oh. Well, never mind. I play a bit.
[*She shows him through.*]

DAWK

I say. What part of the front page?

MARJORIE

I've challenged him to ping-pong, Daddy. You mustn't interrupt us.

DAWK

Oh, I *see*. A game of ping-pong. And you hope something may come of it. Well, well.

MARJORIE [*grimly*]

Something may!

DAWK

But I say. You didn't get ping-pong out of Morris.

MARJORIE

Well, I'm no good at running.

[*Exit.*]

DAWK

No good at running? What does she mean? Well, let's see what she says.

[*Turns to* MORNING POST *again. The sounds of ping-pong are heard.*]

MARJORIE [*off*]

I've won my serve, Daddy.

DAWK [*quite mechanically*]

Well done, dear. Ah, here we have it. Marjorie Dawk. Now what—what does she say? [*He takes glasses out of his case and puts them on. Knock on door.*] Come in.

[*Enter* CONSTABLE.]

DAWK

Well, Spelkins?

CONSTABLE

Very sorry to have to come, sir. Very sorry indeed.

DAWK

Sorry to have to come?

CONSTABLE

It's about Miss Marjorie, sir

DAWK

Miss Marjorie? Nonsense. You can't have anything against her.

CONSTABLE

Sorry, sir, but the law's the law, you know.

DAWK

But you've nothing against *her.*

CONSTABLE

Incitement, sir.

DAWK

Incitement? But I'm sure my girl would never incite to anything, to anything that . . . er. What *is* the absurd trifle, Spelkins?

CONSTABLE

Only murder, sir.

DAWK

What?

CONSTABLE

Just murder.

DAWK

What ever do you mean?

CONSTABLE

You've got it in your hand, sir.

DAWK

Why, I was just going to read it. You don't mean to say she incites to . . .

CONSTABLE

To murder, sir.

DAWK

Why, dear me. I thought it was all about ping-pong. Let me read it.

[*Fumbles.*]

CONSTABLE

I've a copy here, sir.

DAWK

Oh?

CONSTABLE

Yes.

DAWK

What does it say?

CONSTABLE

"To any young man of courage. I will play ping-pong at The Elms, Wimbledon, against any young man on these terms: that if he win he may claim my hand in marriage, with absolute control over whatever my father may settle on me, not less than £300 a year, and if he lose, he shall forthwith die by the sword. Marjorie Dawk."

DAWK

Good gracious. But look here, Spelkins. Look here. No harm whatever has been done yet. I don't quite see . . .

CONSTABLE [*with the air of a sleuth*]

Hark.

DAWK

What?

CONSTABLE

Listen, sir.

DAWK

Ping-pong.

CONSTABLE

She's well on her way to it.

MARJORIE [*off*]

I've won again, Daddy.

DAWK

Good Lord.

CONSTABLE

Just as I said, sir.

DAWK

Well, I'll stop her. Marjorie . . . Marjorie.

MARJORIE

Wait a moment, Daddy.

DAWK

Marjorie. Come at once.

MARJORIE

Oh, Daddy. Don't interrupt me. You've made me lose my serve.

[*Constable moves towards door.*]

DAWK

That's all right. I'll stop her.

CONSTABLE

Lost her serve indeed.

DAWK

Well, perhaps that's best, you know.

CONSTABLE

I've something here that will make her lose her serve.

[*Shows handcuffs.*]

DAWK

No, no, Spelkins. Now look here, how can she kill him even if she wants to? A girl like Marjorie. A strong young man.

CONSTABLE

I see she's got a sword out for it.

DAWK

Now, could she use a great thing like that?

CONSTABLE

Might tell him to do it himself.

DAWK

Now, Spelkins. [*Detaining him from door.*] *Would* you kill yourself with a sword because a girl told you to?

CONSTABLE

Not now I wouldn't, sir.

[*A look of regret for past years goes across his face.*]

DAWK

But look here now. Now, really, Spelkins. Supposing he would.

CONSTABLE

That's what we've got to look at, sir.

DAWK

Well, supposing he would. How's he going to get at himself with it? Look here now, if I take hold of it [*does so*] I'm yards away from the point.

CONSTABLE

Just so, sir. Just so. But she could get someone to do it for her.

DAWK

Well, I won't.

CONSTABLE

Who've you got in the house, sir?

DAWK

Well, Marion and Eliza; you know them. And Blegg who cuts the faggots. Marion or Eliza couldn't handle a thing like that. Marjorie can't do any harm.

CONSTABLE

What about Blegg?

DAWK

Well, of course, he could. But you've known him for the last twenty years. The steadiest man, I should say, in the parish. He'd never do a thing like that.

CONSTABLE

Well, I'll have to make sure, sir, if I'm not to handcuff Miss Marjorie.

DAWK

Certainly. Certainly. Blegg. Blegg. Come here a moment, would you?

BLEGG

Yes, sir.

[*Enter* BLEGG.]

DAWK

Now look here, Blegg. Miss Marjorie sent up a little joke to the *Morning Post,* purely a

joke, and Spelkins has come and taken it very seriously. He wishes to question everybody. Well, all he wants to be sure about is that you for one would never break the law whatever happened. I know you never would.

BLEGG

Oh, no, I never would, sir.

DAWK

Well, that's all we wanted to know.

BLEGG

Lived here man and boy for sixty-four years and never broke it yet, sir.

DAWK

No, that's right.

BLEGG

Not a tittle of it, sir.

DAWK

No, I know, Blegg. Thank you. That's all.

BLEGG

Thank you, sir. [*Going.*] Never a tittle of it.

CONSTABLE

Wait a moment. [*Blegg looks round.*] What we wanted to know was: you'd do anything Miss Marjorie told you?

BLEGG

Oh, yes. Anything Miss *Marjorie* told me. Known her since she could walk.

CONSTABLE

Whether it was against the law or not?

BLEGG

Shouldn't feel anything Miss Marjorie wanted was against the law, like.

CONSTABLE

No, but if it was against the law and she told you to do it, you'd do it whatever it was?

BLEGG

Well, I've known Miss Marjorie since she could walk.

CONSTABLE

So you'd break the law for her?

BLEGG

Miss Marjorie knows a lot more about the law than I do. If she said a thing was right, it would be right.

CONSTABLE

And if she told you to kill a man even, that would be right?

DAWK

No, no, Spelkins, of course not.

CONSTABLE

Wait a moment, sir. *I'm* questioning Blegg. Well?

BLEGG

Why, if Miss Marjorie wanted a man killed; if he were that sort of man; all I can say is, he's better killed, if you ask me.

CONSTABLE

And you'd kill him?

BLEGG

Well, if she'd only me to protect her, I wouldn't have any young man coming monkeying round Miss Marjorie, not if he were that sort of man.

CONSTABLE

You mean she could trust you to kill them?

BLEGG

She could indeed, mister. She could.

DAWK

No, no, Blegg, that's not what you mean at all.

BLEGG

Well, I've known Miss Marjorie since she could walk, you know, sir.

CONSTABLE

And she spoke to you this morning about killing a man.

BLEGG

Yesterday, sir.

DAWK

What!

CONSTABLE

Yesterday. And she told you you'd have to kill him with a sword?

BLEGG

No, she didn't. She didn't say that at all. All she said was "Blegg, I may want you tomorrow." And I said "What for?" And she said "Chopping." And I said: "What do you want chopped, miss?" And she said, "Nothing. But I *may* want something chopped; and if I

do, would you chop it, whatever it was?" And I said, "Yes, miss." And she said, "Even if it's a man's neck?" And I said, "I've known you ever since you could walk, miss." And then we went and got down the old sword. But she didn't say for certain as she'd want anything chopped.

MARJORIE [*off*]

Five all! We're five all, Daddy.

CONSTABLE

Getting along nicely with their game.

DAWK

The devil they are.

[*Constable goes to door R. and opens it.*]

JINKS [*off*]

Shall we play sudden death or vantage games?

CONSTABLE

Come on, miss.

MARJORIE [*off*]

What's the matter?

CONSTABLE

Inspector just wants to have a talk with you up at the station, that's all. And it's my duty to warn you that anything you may say —oh.

[BLEGG *has come towards him with the sword.* CONSTABLE *steps back.* BLEGG *stands in doorway.*]

DAWK

Come, come, Blegg. Put that down. You mustn't do that.

BLEGG

Always was a law-abiding man, sir. But I'm not going to have anyone touching Miss Marjorie.

[*He moves nearer* CONSTABLE.]

CONSTABLE

Here! I wasn't the man she told you to chop.

BLEGG

Don't care about that. I'll chop anyone that interferes with Miss Marjorie.

DAWK

Now, now, Blegg. You know you wouldn't. You know you wouldn't.

BLEGG

Just as soon as I'd chop your faggots, sir. As I've done the last twenty years. [*After a moment's reflection.*] Wet and fine.

[CONSTABLE, *edging away, puts whistle to his lips.*]

DAWK

No, don't blow that. Don't blow that. It can all be explained. It . . .

MARJORIE [*off*]

Oh, what's the matter? [*Enters. Sees sword.*] No, Blegg, not yet. We're only five all, Daddy.

BLEGG

As you like, miss. But you've only to say the word.

MARJORIE [*to Constable*]

Oh, it's you.

CONSTABLE

Yes, miss. The Inspector wants to have just a word with you.

MARJORIE

Very well. But this game must be finished first.

CONSTABLE

If you'd just come here, miss, I've something to show you.

MARJORIE

So long as it doesn't interfere with the game.

CONSTABLE

It might, miss.

MARJORIE

What is it?

CONSTABLE

If you'd come a little farther away from Blegg, miss.

MARJORIE

All right. You don't want that yet, Blegg.

BLEGG

As you wish, miss. As you wish.

[*He puts sword back.* MARJORIE *goes to* CONSTABLE. CONSTABLE *slips handcuffs on.*]

MARJORIE

Oh!

CONSTABLE

Just while you talk to the Inspector, miss.

MARJORIE

No, Blegg! [*Knocking on door.*] Well, somebody say "Come in."

DAWK

Er—come in.

[*Enter* BILL.]

BILL

Marjorie.

MARJORIE

Bill.

BILL

They told me the police were in here. So I came. What is the matter, Marjorie?

MARJORIE

Well, they are. Now, Blegg!

BILL

Well, I'll rescue you if you say a word.

CONSTABLE

Another of them!

JINKS

Excuse me, but I believe that that is my privilege.

MARJORIE [*to* JINKS, *snubbingly*]

We're only five all.

JINKS

I was five all in the Surrey final.

BILL

Who are you?

JINKS

I hope to become Miss Marjorie's fiancé.

BILL

The devil you do.

MARJORIE

Why, Bill. Do you mind?

BILL

Of course I mind.

MARJORIE

You never said so, Bill.

BILL

Didn't you know?

MARJORIE

How could I know?

BILL

Couldn't you guess?

MARJORIE

I thought I'd guessed wrong.

BILL

Well, you guessed right, Marjorie. Of course I mind. I say, you don't want this young gentleman.

JINKS

Sir!

BILL

Send him away, Marjorie.

MARJORIE

It's too late, Bill.

BILL

Too late?

MARJORIE

Too late.

BILL

I say. Are you serious?

MARJORIE

Quite. It's too late.

BILL

But we'll get these handcuffs off. That's some mistake. It will be all right then, Marjorie? It will be all right then?

MARJORIE

No.

BILL

No?

MARJORIE

No. As soon as I get them off I go on with the game. We're committed to that. [*To* JINKS.] Isn't that so?

JINKS

I don't draw back.

BILL

The game? What is it?

CONSTABLE [*shows cutting*]

You see.

BILL

Lord! And [*to* JINKS] you won't back out?

JINKS

No, sir.

BILL

Quite right. Quite right from your point of view. But, oh, Marjorie.

MARJORIE

We can't go back.

JINKS

No.

MARJORIE

So perhaps you'll all help me to get these handcuffs off.

[BLEGG *and* JINKS *close on* CONSTABLE. *No one helps* CONSTABLE.]

JINKS

Come on. Give us the key quietly.

CONSTABLE

If you dare to touch me.

JINKS

Come on, give us it quietly.

BLEGG

Thankee. [BLEGG *unlocks handcuffs and gives them to* CONSTABLE.] Here you are, mister.

CONSTABLE

I've got *all* of your names in this book.

MARJORIE

Come on, Mr. Jinks. We must finish the set. I'm sorry, Bill. Wait there, Blegg, in case.

JINKS

I was five all, you know, in the Surrey final.

CONSTABLE [*reading over his list again*]
Yes, all your names.

DAWK [*to* BILL]

If only you'd spoken sooner.

BILL

I couldn't. I didn't know till to-day that I could have afforded it.

DAWK

Never mind that. You should have spoken sooner.

BILL

I feel everything's ended.

DAWK

Oh, you'll find plenty to do.

BILL

It's all come to an end.

[*Heavy and determined knocking.* CONSTABLE *gets out pencil and reopens book.*]

DAWK

Oh, come in.

[*Enter* MR. LEONARD.]

CONSTABLE

And *your* name, sir?

LEONARD

Never you mind my name. [*To* DAWK.] Is this the Elms?

DAWK [*wearily*]

Oh, yes.

LEONARD

Thank you. Is Mr. Jinks in here?

DAWK

Oh, I believe so. In there. Playing ping-pong.

LEONARD

Playing ping-pong is he?

DAWK [*wearily*]

What is *your* objection?

LEONARD

I will tell you my objection, sir, if you will be so good as to call him.

DAWK

Oh, very well. [*Goes to door.*] Marjorie. Marjorie.

MARJORIE

Yes?

DAWK

More trouble.

MARJORIE

What is it?

DAWK

A gentleman says he must see Mr. Jinks.

LEONARD

Instantly.

CONSTABLE

Are you from Scotland Yard, sir?

LEONARD

Certainly not.

[*Enter* JINKS *and* MARJORIE.]

JINKS

What is it?

LEONARD

I have come to warn you, sir.

JINKS

To warn me?

LEONARD

Such is my duty. I may as well tell you who I am. I am the Secretary of the World Ping-Pong Amateur Association.

JINKS

Mr. Leonard?

LEONARD

The same, sir. And it is my duty to warn you that if you are playing for the considera-

tion or emolument (those are the Committee's exact words) set forth in this cutting from to-day's *Morning Post,* you forfeit your amateur status.

JINKS

Good God!

MARJORIE

But you can hardly say . . .

LEONARD

Any consideration whatever.

JINKS

I'm not playing for money.

LEONARD

May I ask, sir, would you settle nothing at all on your daughter?

DAWK

If you mean would I give her away absolutely penniless, no.

LEONARD [*to* JINKS]

Well, sir?

JINKS

Wouldn't the Committee reconsider . . . ?

LEONARD

Their decision is final.

[JINKS *drops his ping-pong bat.*]

JINKS [*to* MARJORIE]

I must scratch.

MARJORIE

You'll draw back?

JINKS

I must.

LEONARD

I will inform the Committee. [*To* DAWK.] Good morning, sir. [*To* MARJORIE.] Good morning. [*To* JINKS.] After you, sir.

[JINKS *gives a hopeless shrug and walks downcast into the street. Exit* LEONARD.]

MARJORIE

You needn't wait, Blegg.

BLEGG

Thank you, Miss. Then I'll get back to my faggots.

BILL [*picking up Jinks's bat*]

Marjorie. Would you care for a quiet game with me? A friendly game, I mean.

MARJORIE

Yes, Bill. Come on.

[*Exeunt.*]

DAWK

Well, Spelkins, I'm very sorry about all this. But it will be all right now, won't it?

CONSTABLE

Well, sir, I don't want to be too hard, now that they're playing quiet like.

[*They both listen a moment to the sounds of the game.*]

DAWK

No. Sit down, Spelkins. [*Both sit.*] And . . . Hullo. Why, they seem to have stopped.

[CONSTABLE *listens too. No sounds of ping-pong.*]

CONSTABLE

That's what they've done, sir. They've stopped.

DAWK

I hope she's not overtired herself.

CONSTABLE

No, sir. I don't think so, sir.

DAWK

You think not.

CONSTABLE

No, sir. I remember me and my missus. My girl she was then. Her father had a licensed house out at Bromley, and a nice little lawn at the back. My girl and I we used to go there of an evening to play a bit of bowls. A fine set of bowls he had.

DAWK

Did he really?

CONSTABLE

Yes, sir. He did, the old chap. And *we* usedn't to play much bowls.

DAWK

Oh. You didn't?

CONSTABLE

No, sir.

CURTAIN

THE RAFFLE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Sir James Elford, *a business man who has bought a place in the country.*

Miss Elford, *his sister.*

The Rev. John Biffins.

The Dark Stranger.

The Bishop of Sand and Murrow.

THE RAFFLE

Scene

The smoking-room of Sir James Elford's *house in the country. Ground floor, with French windows opening on to garden, in which a garden-party or church bazaar is raging. Amongst papers on his table lies a folded legal document (about four inches by ten), which turns out to be a bond payable to bearer, value £2,500. The bond that is laid there later is similar in size and shape.*

Biffins

The raffle will be announced, Sir James, by the ringing of a bell.

Miss Elford

Oh, that will be an excellent way, Mr. Biffins, an excellent way.

Biffins

Yes, we have a little hand-bell of a rather attractive note; a gift, you know, a gift from dear Mrs. Muldroon.

MISS ELFORD

Dear Mrs. Muldroon. Such a helpmeet to the dear bishop.

BIFFINS

Yes, they both arrived looking so well. They are in the garden now, partaking of a little strawberry ice.

SIR JAMES

Well, look here.

MISS ELFORD

Oh, I *hope* they are enjoying it. So nice of them to share in our simple pleasures.

BIFFINS

Oh, yes, his lordship expressed himself as very well satisfied with the strawberry ice. Very . . .

SIR JAMES

Look here.

BIFFINS

Oh?

SIR JAMES

Look here. I've got the bond here. You'd better have it.

BIFFINS

Oh, not yet, Sir James, not yet. A few little preparations yet. A few preliminary arrangements.

SIR JAMES

Well, it's here when you want it.

BIFFINS

Very well, Sir James. Very well.

MISS ELFORD

And my little tea-cosy. The humble receptacle. That is quite ready too.

BIFFINS

Ah, Miss Elford, humble no doubt, as becomes us all, and yet in its way as acceptable as the great sum that it will contain. In its way perhaps even inestimably worthier than £2,500.

MISS ELFORD

Oh, Mr. Biffins.

BIFFINS

I will make the necessary preparations, and arrange for the ringing of the bell.

[*Exit.*]

SIR JAMES

Well, how a sane business man can promise £2,500 worth of good bonds for a silly bazaar as I've done . . .

MISS ELFORD

Oh, James.

SIR JAMES

. . . As I've done, passes my comprehension. If indeed I *am* sane!

MISS ELFORD

James!

SIR JAMES

Yes, I think that listening to Biffins' maunderings unhinged my intellect, until I was easy fruit for a shrewd fellow like that bishop.

MISS ELFORD

James. Really!

SIR JAMES

Yes, I. A man with a certain repute in the city. Looked on as a pretty hard-headed man, and watched pretty closely on the Stock Exchange to see how I think things are going. And do you know what I am?

MISS ELFORD

James, you're heated.

SIR JAMES

Do you know what I am? I'm a mug.

MISS ELFORD

You're heated now. But you've given liberally. Liberally, James. And your reward will be elsewhere, if you don't spoil it all by a fit of temper.

SIR JAMES

Temper, indeed. Well, it's done now. There's the damned bond.

MISS ELFORD

What, James?

SIR JAMES

Well, there's the bond. It's worth £2,500, payable to bearer. It's there. I've pencilled £2,500 on the outside so that you will know. Don't go and pick up the wrong bit of paper. I rather hope you will.

MISS ELFORD

You must think me very careless, James.

SIR JAMES

Well, who am I to call people careless when I've given away good securities for £2,500, for you to put under that damned tea-cosy and raffle?

MISS ELFORD

James!

SIR JAMES

Yes, it *is* a damned tea-cosy. I was wrong about the bond; but it is a damned tea-cosy. Fancy putting good securities under a damned thing like that and raffling them.

MISS ELFORD

James, I shall leave you.

SIR JAMES

Yes, leave me to my folly.

MISS ELFORD

I will. You had earned your reward by this, and you're throwing it away with both hands.

SIR JAMES

I wish I could if I could get my £2,500 back. And I wish Biffins was with the Devil!

MISS ELFORD

James, you are in a mood that is open to the very worst influences.

[*Exit.*]

SIR JAMES

Well, let them come. Let them. . . . Hullo.

[*Enter the* DARK STRANGER.]

DARK STRANGER

Your garden-party is so delightful, Sir James.

SIR JAMES

Oh? I'm glad.

DARK STRANGER

One of the most delightful I've ever attended.

SIR JAMES

Oh, I——

DARK STRANGER

One can hardly tear oneself away from it to come in here.

SIR JAMES

Oh? You, er? You came over with the bishop?

DARK STRANGER

Well, no. Er, no. No, not with the bishop.

SIR JAMES

Mrs. Muldroon invited you, I expect.

DARK STRANGER

Well, no. No, in the end she didn't.

SIR JAMES

But I don't think I quite remember you.

DARK STRANGER

No, Sir James. And the fact is you didn't invite me.

SIR JAMES

Really?

DARK STRANGER

Well, not exactly. No, it was business that brought me.

SIR JAMES

Business?

DARK STRANGER

It often does.

SIR JAMES

I don't think I quite understand what you want with me.

DARK STRANGER

If you want nothing with me, Sir James, I will go. But I came to make you an offer of £2,000 in a matter of business.

SIR JAMES

Oh, business. Do sit down. [DARK STRANGER *sits.*] Will you have a cigar?

[DARK STRANGER *accepts it and lights up.*]

DARK STRANGER

Well, I hope you'll forgive me coming in like this. But business always attracts me. And as I have a perfectly sound offer to make I took the liberty . . .

SIR JAMES

Don't mention it. I'm delighted to see you, delighted. You find that cigar all right?

DARK STRANGER

Perfect.

SIR JAMES

I don't mind saying that it's a great relief to me to be talking with you after Mr. Biffins. He gets on my nerves.

DARK STRANGER

It was about him that I came.

SIR JAMES

Oh, really?

DARK STRANGER

Yes. Well, you see, I am a collector. I'll ask you to bear in mind, Sir James, that most collections are very silly. I mean people collect luggage labels and, well, anything.

SIR JAMES

Yes. Yes, of course.
[*He lights a cigar too.*]

DARK STRANGER

And other people's collections always seem silly *whatever* they are. I mean to say that my collection is not interesting like yours. But my offer is sound enough. Two thousand in cash.

SIR JAMES

What do you know of my collection, may I ask?

DARK STRANGER

Nothing. I only mean that other people's collections always seem absurd compared to one's own.

SIR JAMES

Yes, *I* see. And what do you collect?

DARK STRANGER

Souls.

SIR JAMES

I beg your pardon?

DARK STRANGER

Souls.

[*Knocking ash off into ash-tray in matter-of-fact way.*]

SIR JAMES

I don't quite follow.

DARK STRANGER

I collect souls. And I've come to offer you two thousand pounds for the soul of the Rev. John Biffins.

SIR JAMES

You collect souls? Who are you?

DARK STRANGER

Haven't you guessed?

SIR JAMES

Well, I suppose I have.

DARK STRANGER

Then I thought that between ourselves we ought to be able to arrange a matter of business.

SIR JAMES

You said two thousand?

DARK STRANGER

Yes.

SIR JAMES

But Biffins' soul doesn't belong to me.

DARK STRANGER

Aren't you squire here?

SIR JAMES

Yes—oh, yes. But you know things aren't what they were.

DARK STRANGER

Aren't you in with him a good deal?

SIR JAMES

Yes, damn him. I am. Too much.

DARK STRANGER

I expect you could persuade him.

SIR JAMES

I don't see how.

DARK STRANGER

Well, he persuaded you.

SIR JAMES

Oh, about the raffle? Well, it was the bishop that got that out of me.

DARK STRANGER

Couldn't you try?

SIR JAMES

I'd like to. Damn it. I'd like to. Only . . .

DARK STRANGER

Only what?

SIR JAMES

You mentioned two thousand pounds.

DARK STRANGER

Yes.

SIR JAMES

Well, you see, he's the sort of fellow who'd set a lot of *store* by his soul.

DARK STRANGER

You think two thousand's not enough.

SIR JAMES

As a price, as a price for the actual goods, no doubt it would be enough. I don't say it wouldn't. The question is whether he'd take it.

DARK STRANGER

I should think you could persuade him to take a good deal less.

SIR JAMES

I'm afraid not. There's a very small margin for profit. Why don't you persuade him yourself?

DARK STRANGER

I thought an intermediary would ensure better results. And as you are the squire, Sir James, I naturally came to you. If the offer doesn't appeal to you, I will go for a walk amongst your guests, and apologize for having encroached on your time.

[*He prepares to rise.*]

SIR JAMES

Wait a moment. I should like to do business with you. I quite appreciate the offer. Only the probable margin of profit seemed to be so small, on account of his setting so much store by it.

DARK STRANGER

Well, well, Sir James; you were thinking of asking me two thousand five hundred.

SIR JAMES

How did you know what I was thinking?

DARK STRANGER

That is my job.

SIR JAMES

Very well. I was.

DARK STRANGER

Well, shall we call it two thousand five hundred, Sir James?

SIR JAMES

Well, all right. I never liked to stand out for too much. One makes much better connections by satisfying everybody. I . . . I . . .

DARK STRANGER

Quite so. We part very good friends. Now that is the bond I suggest. You see he parts with all rights here or elsewhere in the following goods or commodity, that is to say his soul, to you absolutely, in consideration of . . . ; well, that is your affair, and I hope you make a good profit.

SIR JAMES

Thanks. Well, naturally, I'll try. But I'm afraid it won't be very large, on account of the store he sets by it. But never mind.

DARK STRANGER

Well, you'll see what you can do with him. Then he signs it there, and then you merely sign this brief footnote re-assigning all rights to me in consideration of two thousand five hundred pounds.

SIR JAMES

Yes, I see. I'll have all that made out. When shall I see you?

DARK STRANGER

Oh, I'll drop in.

SIR JAMES

Thanks so much. You're going now?

DARK STRANGER

Just for a stroll amongst your guests.

SIR JAMES

I'm afraid you'll find a Church Bazaar rather dull.

DARK STRANGER

Oh, I rather like them.

SIR JAMES

Well, I'll do what I can then.

DARK STRANGER

Thank you so much.

SIR JAMES

Well, good-bye.

DARK STRANGER

Good-bye.

[*Goes out smoking jauntily.*]

SIR JAMES

H'm . . . H'm . . . Well, I'll get back *some* of my two thousand five hundred anyway.

[*Enter* BIFFINS.]

BIFFINS

You wanted to see me, Sir James.

SIR JAMES

No.

BIFFINS

Oh, but a gentleman just came up to me and said you did. I mean a gentleman with a most charming manner, very charming indeed. I do not think he can have wilfully misled me.

SIR JAMES

Oh, yes, of course. Yes, I do.

BIFFINS

I didn't think he would have misled me.

SIR JAMES

No. Well, Mr. Biffins, I am a business man, as you know.

BIFFINS

Oh, yes, Sir James, and a very generous one I'm sure we've all had cause to know that since you came here.

SIR JAMES

Well, anyway, I'm a business man.

BIFFINS

Oh, yes, Sir James. In the city. Of course.

SIR JAMES

So I'm going to make you a business offer.

BIFFINS

Yes, Sir James?

SIR JAMES

I hope you'll treat it as such.

BIFFINS

Oh, certainly, Sir James.

SIR JAMES

Purely as a business matter.

BIFFINS

As you wish, Sir James. Certainly. As you wish.

SIR JAMES

Because, well, because it *is* a business matter; and that is all about it.

BIFFINS

I understand, Sir James.

SIR JAMES

Well, the fact is, you see; the fact is, I have my cheque-book here, and I was thinking of offering you a thousand pounds for your soul.

BIFFINS

For my soul, Sir James?

SIR JAMES

Yes, a thousand pounds.

BIFFINS

Oh, I couldn't, Sir James, I couldn't. With all the respect in the world, I really couldn't. Oh, it would be, it would be a dreadful deprivation.

SIR JAMES

But look what you could do with a thousand pounds.

BIFFINS

Oh, I know, Sir James. It's very liberal of you indeed. Very liberal. But really, I couldn't.

SIR JAMES

You only have to sign this. Just sign it here, and I give a cheque for a thousand.

BIFFINS

Oh, no, Sir James. I don't think you understand how much it means to me. I really feel I couldn't.

SIR JAMES

Well, then, I tell you what. I tell you what. I'll give you twelve hundred and fifty.

BIFFINS

It's a great sum, Sir James, but even for that . . . I really have the greatest compunction.

SIR JAMES

Now look here, Mr. Biffins. Am I the squire or am I not?

BIFFINS

Oh, yes, Sir James. Oh, yes.

SIR JAMES

Well, very well. Do you refuse to do business with me?

BIFFINS

Oh, no, Sir James.

SIR JAMES

Well, that is what it amounts to.

BIFFINS

I didn't actually refuse, Sir James. I only said I had great compunctions. And so I have, the very greatest compunctions.

SIR JAMES

Well, *I* had the greatest compunctions when the bishop asked me for that two thousand five hundred. (*Points to it.*) But he got over my compunctions and talked me round. It seems rather hard that *my* compunctions should be treated as amounting to nothing; but, the moment I try to do a bit of business with one of you on my own, all these compunctions are put in my way.

BIFFINS

Oh, but Sir James, I can't *help* having compunctions.

SIR JAMES

Nor can I. But I put mine aside to amuse the neighbourhood. And now you won't treat me in the same way.

BIFFINS

Well, Sir James, if you put it like that . . .

SIR JAMES

And look what you could do with twelve hundred and fifty pounds.

BIFFINS

Oh, yes, I know. But I still have the greatest compunctions. But to oblige *you,* Sir James, only to oblige *you.*

SIR JAMES

All right, then, you sign here. Just read what you're signing while I write the cheque.

BIFFINS

It's only to oblige you, Sir James.

SIR JAMES

Yes, I know. You see you just part with all rights in your soul, to me absolutely. That's all you do, and I've made out this cheque to you

for one thousand two hundred and fifty pounds.

BIFFINS

Thank you, Sir James, thank you. I feel I still have great compunctions. But thank you very much. [SIR JAMES *gives cheque.*] Thank you. And now I must really go and arrange for the raffle.

SIR JAMES

Very well. My sister will bring you the security whenever you're ready, and her tea-cosy.

BIFFINS

Oh, yes. Of course the tea-cosy. Especially the tea-cosy. [*Goes to door.*] Ahem. I was thinking; I fear I must inform the bishop of this. I feel I must tell the bishop.

SIR JAMES

The bishop? Good Lord! Don't tell a soul.

BIFFINS

Oh, I feel I must tell the bishop.

SIR JAMES

Tell the bishop? What ever for?

BIFFINS

Oh, I feel I must.

SIR JAMES

Well, I wouldn't.

BIFFINS

Oh, I feel I ought.

[*Exit.*]

SIR JAMES

Hum! That'll make trouble. Meanwhile this is worth two thousand five hundred to me. [*Writes on outside of bond in pencil, saying aloud.*] Two thousand five hundred. [*Looks out of window.*] Good Lord, he's telling him. [*Steps are heard running.*] Running!

[BISHOP *appears in doorway a bit blown.* SIR JAMES *throws the bond on to table, where it falls more or less on top of the other one.*]

BISHOP

Sir James, I have just heard Mr. Biffins' dreadful story.

SIR JAMES

Oh, yes. Well I did a bit of business with Mr. Biffins.

BISHOP

Business, Sir James! A shocking transaction.

SIR JAMES

Well, of course in business one may sometimes do a deal that doesn't look all it should, if it gets out. But what did he want to blurt it out for?

BISHOP

It was his duty, Sir James, to tell me of this most shocking transaction.

SIR JAMES

Well, I am a good deal out of pocket over this bazaar, and I felt I was entitled to get a little back by a business deal if I could.

BISHOP

I am pained, Sir James; I am inexpressibly pained. Nor can I conceive how it is possible for you to make anything whatever by this extraordinary and very painful joke.

SIR JAMES

As a matter of fact, someone has offered me a considerable sum for this very stuff.

BISHOP

For this very stuff, Sir James? My comprehension may be weak, but it fails to follow you.

SIR JAMES

For Mr. Biffins' soul.

BISHOP

His soul? A considerable sum? Who? Who offered you this?

SIR JAMES

Well, he seems to be the fellow you preach against.

BISHOP

The fellow I. . . . Oh! And in a Christian country. May I *ask* you, Sir James, how ever you found yourself able to do what you say you have done?

SIR JAMES

Well, Bishop, if you had a sister like mine, she'd drive you to it.

BISHOP

Oh! How dreadful.

SIR JAMES

I see how it looks to you, Bishop. But then, you see, I'm a business man, and a deal is a deal to me. I don't mind giving money away if I've got to; but I never go back on a deal.

BISHOP

I am inexpressibly pained.

SIR JAMES

But I'm prepared to meet you, Bishop. What do you say to three thousand five hundred? Three thousand five hundred pounds and Biffins' soul is yours.

BISHOP

You ask me to buy this poor man's soul from you?

SIR JAMES

I give you the option.

BISHOP

Are you aware of the dreadful nature of this traffic that you propose?

SIR JAMES

Well, to me it's business. I thought you might be glad of the opportunity.

BISHOP

So I would. So I would. I would welcome anything that would enable me to save that poor man from his folly.

SIR JAMES

Well, three thousand five hundred is my price. I hope we shall agree on it.

BISHOP

That is my difficulty.

SIR JAMES

Well, Bishop, I'm sure that I've named nothing you can't afford.

BISHOP

That is not quite the point.

SIR JAMES

No?

BISHOP

No. You see, I've been a bishop for some years now. And I necessarily have a certain amount of experience. And if I were to begin, only to *begin,* to pay more for anything than its reasonable value, I should in a very short while have nothing left, like any other

spendthrift. A bishop *cannot* give reckless prices.

SIR JAMES

I make a small profit, of course, in everything that I touch. But I don't think that "reckless prices" is a phrase fairly describing the price that I ask of anybody.

BISHOP

Now, Sir James, I am a very busy man and necessarily I acquire a certain amount of experience, just as you do yourself.

SIR JAMES

Oh, certainly.

BISHOP

Well, then, between ourselves, strictly between our two selves. *Is* the soul of Mr. Biffins worth the price you are asking?

SIR JAMES

Well, I didn't say it was, quite. I naturally have my profit.

BISHOP

Can you conscientiously say that your profit would be a reasonable one?

SIR JAMES

Well, it's all a question of supply and demand. You seemed eager to get it, and I should have thought it was worth that to you.

BISHOP

No, no. There are innumerable demands on a bishop's purse. He cannot afford to pay fancy prices for anything.

[MR. BIFFINS *is heard with his silly bell, ringing up and down the garden. Both men listen to him. Somehow the noise seems to convince* SIR JAMES *that he is asking too much.*]

SIR JAMES

Well, shall we say three thousand?

BISHOP

No, no, I cannot give so much for . . .

[*Enter* MISS ELFORD.]

BISHOP

. . . for the matter in question.

MISS ELFORD

Oh. I will not disturb you a moment.

[*She runs up to tea-cosy, takes bond from the table, and runs out archly.*]

SIR JAMES

Well, Bishop, I can't take less. It would scarcely leave me a profit.

BISHOP

I cannot. I cannot pay three thousand pounds for the soul of Mr. Biffins. My position compels me to consider prices as carefully as you would. And I cannot, I cannot in anything, go so far beyond its intrinsic value.

SIR JAMES

Well, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I cannot meet you and I'm sorry for Mr. Biffins. But I cannot appreciably reduce my demand and leave myself any considerable increase over what I shall get for that. [*Points to table where he threw bond.*] One can't let sentiment enter into business.

BISHOP

No. I understand that.

SIR JAMES

But I thought you might put up three thousand pounds to save Mr. Biffins.

BISHOP

No, no, I cannot make exceptions. I cannot give more than things are worth just because

I am a bishop. Quite the contrary. If once I made an exception everyone would take advantage of me.

SIR JAMES

It's not so very much.

BISHOP

Now, Sir James, a diocese requires as much *savoir faire* as perhaps any business.

SIR JAMES

Oh, yes, I grant you that.

BISHOP

Well then, as two men of affairs, *is* the soul of Mr. Biffins worth what you're asking for it?

SIR JAMES

Well. Well, no. But you know, Bishop, we business men, we don't ask what things are worth, we ask what we think we can get.

BISHOP

Yes, and I as a bishop of a very large diocese, with many demands on my purse, go very carefully into every demand; and where I make purchases I do so only at reasonable prices.

SIR JAMES

Well, what would you say was a reasonable price, Bishop? I won't spoil a deal for the sake of a hundred or so. What would you say was reasonable?

BISHOP

A thousand pounds.

SIR JAMES

Impossible.

BISHOP

Not a penny more.

SIR JAMES

It would be sheer loss to me.

BISHOP

I couldn't give more than a thousand for Mr. Biffins' soul.

SIR JAMES

We cannot meet then?

BISHOP

No.

SIR JAMES

It seems hard on Biffins.

BISHOP

Nobody would give such a price for it.

SIR JAMES

Then there seems nothing to be done.

[BISHOP *sadly shakes his head.*]

[*Enter* BIFFINS *running and skipping, hugging the tea-cosy.*]

BIFFINS

Oh, I've won it, I've won it. My lord, I've won it.

BISHOP

Control yourself, Mr. Biffins. I congratulate you. Two thousand five hundred pounds will mean a great deal. But control yourself.

BIFFINS

Oh, my lord, it wasn't the two thousand five hundred. It was my soul. Oh, the joy of it. The joy of it. Look, my lord, look. [*He shows the* BISHOP *the bond that he had signed.*] You see, my lord, you see, it has two thousand five hundred written on it in pencil; but it isn't that, my lord, it isn't that. It's that bond that I signed, that I told you of.

BISHOP

Let me see.

[*He takes it.* SIR JAMES *looks over his shoulder.*]

SIR JAMES

Why? What? [*He rushes to table.*] She's taken the wrong one and raffled it.

BISHOP

Yes, that's it.

BIFFINS

Oh, the inexpressible joy.

CURTAIN

THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MR. POLLIT, *a Playwright.*
MR. TOTE, *Stage Manager.*
ALF, BILL } *Scene Shifters.*
MR. TRENDERS, MR. HANLEY } *Actors.*
MISS PHYLLIS PERKINS, *a Famous Actress.*

THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL

SCENE

The Lord Chamberlain's Theatre.

TIME

The Present.

ALF

Come on, Bill; they're going to go through that curtain-raiser.

[*They bring bed to centre back.*]

BILL

What do they want?

ALF

All the usual stuff.

[*They bring on bedroom utensils.*]

BILL

What's the curtain-raiser, Alf?

ALF

"The Journey of the Soul" they call it.

BILL

"The Journey of the Sole"? Soles don't make journeys.

ALF

'Ow do you mean—don't make journeys?

BILL

They just flap about in the sea.

ALF

Well, can't he flap from one sea to another.

BILL

Yes; I suppose so. Who's playing it?

ALF

Mr. Trender.

BILL

He's not generally funny.

ALF

Give it me.

BILL

Alf——

ALF

They'll want that here.

BILL

Alf——

ALF

Well?

BILL

If it's all about a sole, will they want a bed?

ALF

Of course they'll want a bed.

BILL

What for, Alf?

ALF

'Aven't you ever heard of dramatic technique?

BILL

Yes. Read of it often.

ALF

Well, they always do have a bed in this theatre. It's dramatic technique.

BILL

Well, we've got it fixed up for them.

[*They sit on the bed.*]

ALF

Talking to Mr. Zoss himself the other day, and he tells me about this very thing. The public, he says, demands a bed. Doesn't care about beds himself, but the public must have it; and as a humble servant of the public, he says, he has to give it 'em. And what Mr. Zoss doesn't know . . .

BILL

Oh, that's all right. Still, I can't see as how a sole can want to flap about in a bed.

ALF

That's 'cause you know nothing about dramatic technique.

BILL

Well, the sea's the place for a sole.

[*Enter the* STAGE MANAGER.]

STAGE MANAGER

We shan't need a bed to-day, Alf.

ALF

Not need a bed, sir?

STAGE MANAGER

No; not to-day.

ALF

God 'elp us!

[*They take off some utensils.*]

[*Enter the great actress,* PHYLLIS PERKINS.]

STAGE MANAGER

Oh, good-morning, Miss Perkins. I'm afraid we aren't quite ready for you yet.

PHYLLIS

Good-morning.

STAGE MANAGER

We've a bit of a curtain-raiser to run through, but it will only take a few minutes. Mr. Pollit! Mr. Pollit! Would you mind coming? "Journey of the Soul," please. We'll only be a few minutes, Miss Perkins, if you don't mind.

PHYLLIS

Not at all. I'm before my time.

[*She sits on bed.*]

[*Re-enter* BILL *and* ALF.]

STAGE MANAGER

Oh, well, you can leave the bed for the present.

ALF

It will never go without a bed, sir.

STAGE MANAGER

Oh, won't it? We *make* 'em go here. We *make* 'em.

[*Exit* ALF, *wagging a doubtful head. Exit* BILL.]

[*Enter* POLLIT.]

STAGE MANAGER

Ah, this is Mr. Pollit, Miss Perkins. He's written the little thing that comes on before yours.

POLLIT

Oh, it's nothing really. How do you do? It's not anything. It's nothing compared with what you do.

PHYLLIS

What's it about?

POLLIT

Well, it's called "The Journey of the Soul."

PHYLLIS

Oh?

POLLIT

Yes; you see the Soul sets out accompanied by Hope to find the Celestial Heights. Well, then, he meets Despair and Remorse, and—and Temptation; and—and all that sort of thing.

PHYLLIS [*unhappily*]

Oh.

POLLIT

Yes; and after that he meets Sin.

PHYLLIS

Oh, does he?

POLLIT

Yes; and then—of course I'm not *telling* it very well—then he comes at last to a sort of place where he meets one with an inexpressibly beautiful face, and . . .

PHYLLIS [*slightly interested*]

Oh?

POLLIT

Yes; and he . . .

PHYLLIS [*bored again*]

Oh, it's a he?

POLLIT

Well, it's a sort of an angel, you know, really. They aren't any particular sex, I think.

PHYLLIS [*very bored*]

Oh.

POLLIT

Yes; and then you see—

PHYLLIS

But does anything *happen* at all?

POLLIT

Oh, yes. You see he guides the Soul of Man to the Celestial Heights—and that of course, well, that's Eternity really. It's rather . . . er, er. . . . What do you think of it, Miss Perkins?

PHYLLIS

Oh, well, I think, you know, you ought to have something happen a little more.

STAGE MANAGER

Oh, that will be all right, Miss Perkins. We'll put in lots of things. Ginger it up, you know.

POLLIT

Well, I don't know if I'd like too much put in, you know.

STAGE MANAGER

No, no; not too much. Just what you want to say yourself, you know. Only put so that it will get over.

POLLIT

I . . . see. . . . What sort of things exactly?

STAGE MANAGER

Well, there's the journey itself, for instance. You want to tell them that it takes—it's a hundred years, isn't it?

POLLIT

Yes.

STAGE MANAGER

Well, you want them to know it.

POLLIT

But I tell them that right at the beginning of the play.

STAGE MANAGER

Right at the beginning. Yes. That's the point. They're none of them in their places by then.

POLLIT

None of them?

STAGE MANAGER

Except the pit.

POLLIT

Oh.

STAGE MANAGER

No. You want to get it over. Now a little bit about the South Eastern would *show* them that it was a slow journey. I've thought of a bit that would make your point quite clear, and it would be sure of a laugh. One's always sure of a laugh over the South Eastern.

POLLIT

Well, I'm not quite sure that I quite wanted a laugh. You see, it's meant to be rather serious, and . . .

STAGE MANAGER

You don't quite *want* a laugh? You *don't want* a laugh? Well, if you'd told me that before. I mean to say, I've spent a lot of time on your play, and if you'd told me before that you didn't want a laugh— Well, I should have perhaps understood you better, that's all.

POLLIT

Well, I'm sorry; but I'd much rather they didn't laugh, if you don't mind.

STAGE MANAGER

We can't have them all scared out of the house by your trying to be solemn.

POLLIT

You see I meant the Soul really to be each of their own souls, and——

STAGE MANAGER

Well, let's get on with it; they're all here. [*Reads.*] "One with an inexpressibly beautiful face." Come on, Mr. Hanley. We'll start from there. We shan't keep you long, Miss Perkins.

PHYLLIS

Never mind.

STAGE MANAGER

"One with an inexpressibly . . ." [*Sees* HANLEY, *who has been lolling against the wings, coming forward with script.*] That's right. [MR. HANLEY *is not looking his best to-day, and his cigarette has a sickly droop.*] Now, where's the Soul?

TRENDER

Oh, I beg your pardon.

STAGE MANAGER

Come on, Mr. Trender, please. We're taking it from where one with an inexpressibly beautiful face comes on.

TRENDER

Oh, all right.

[*Takes script from pocket.*]

HANLEY [*reading, still smoking*]

"Henceforward follow me.
Yonder below you lie the forms and shades
Of monstrous images."

TRENDER

Just a moment. [*Turns pages.*] Oh, all right.

HANLEY

"Henceforward follow me.
Yonder below you lie the forms and shades
Of monstrous images; amongst them Sin
With all her children—Gluttony and Sloth,
O'er-reaching Pride and deadly Lechery,
And stubborn . . ."

PHYLLIS

Mr. Tote.

STAGE MANAGER

Yes.

PHYLLIS

Excuse me a moment. Would you mind if I got ready for "A Girl On Her Own"?

STAGE MANAGER

Certainly, Miss Perkins, certainly. We'll only be a few minutes.

PHYLLIS

Thank you so much.
[*She takes off her hat.*]

STAGE MANAGER

All right, Mr. Hanley.

HANLEY

"Henceforward follow me.
Yonder below you lie the forms and shades
Of monstrous images; amongst them Sin
With all her children—Gluttony and Sloth,
O'er-reaching Pride and deadly Lechery."

[MISS PERKINS *gets into the bed.*]

"And stubborn worldliness, not to be turned."
[*Pointing as to a mountain-top before them.*]
"And yonder lies the goal of all desire,
Erect, transcendent, shining, seen more far
Than on earth only . . ."
(Damn this typescript; it's like mud!)
"Than on earth only, gleaming to great spheres
That throng the night in numbers past thy guess."
Mr. Tote, how *am* I to read this script? It's all blurred like *this*.

STAGE MANAGER

Well, she's done her best.

HANLEY

Oh, all right. I'll try and make it out.

STAGE MANAGER

Now, Mr. Trender.

TRENDER

Excuse me one moment; I wanted to ask Mr. Pollit . . .

POLLIT

Yes?

TRENDER

I wanted to be sure if I quite got your symbolism. Which kind of a soul did you mean?

POLLIT

Which *kind* of soul?

TRENDER

Yes. You see there's—there's what one calls one's immortal soul . . .

POLLIT

Yes?

TRENDER

Well, and then there's the kind we eat.

POLLIT

Oh, Heavens!

TRENDER

Well, I only wanted to be sure if I got your idea.

STAGE MANAGER

Well, perhaps we'd better get on. "That throng the night in numbers past thy guess." We'll go on from there.

TRENDER

"Henceforth I follow; those dark images
Forgotten, and all else that is of Earth.
That peak alone shall beckon . . ."
or is it "reckon?" I can't read it either.

STAGE MANAGER

Let me see. [*Sees.*] It's "reckon."

POLLIT

No, no, no. "Beckon."

STAGE MANAGER

Well, she's *put* "reckon."

POLLIT

No, no, *no.*

STAGE MANAGER

Well, it's "reckon" here.

POLLIT

Oh, it's all wrong. It should be "beckon."

STAGE MANAGER

Are you sure?

POLLIT

Of course I'm sure.

STAGE MANAGER

Well, if you like; but "reckon" seems better to me. What do you think, Mr. Trender?

TRENDER

Well, I think "reckon's" better. I don't see how a peak could beckon very well. Not a mountain peak.

POLLIT

Well, how could it reckon?

TRENDER

Well, I don't know of course. I don't quite see what you're driving at.

STAGE MANAGER

Well, perhaps we'd better get on. We'll have it "beckon," Mr. Pollit, to please you. We'll have it just as you want. But perhaps after

this you wouldn't mind letting us get on with it by ourselves. We'll get through much quicker that way; and you can safely leave it in my hands. You see, we've met you over "reckon," and now if you'll just meet us by letting us get on with the rehearsal——

[*Exeunt* STAGE MANAGER *and* POLLIT.]

TRENDER

Well, where were we?
"That peak alone shall reckon me and guide
These weary feet——"

HANLEY

Better wait for Tote.

TRENDER

All right. Alf!

[*Enter* ALF.]

ALF

Yes, sir?

TRENDER

Where's Mr. Tote?

ALF

He's seeing off of Mr. Pollit, sir.

HANLEY [*to* TRENDER]

This thing will never go. There's no snap in it.

ALF

Oh, it will go all right, sir. Mr. Tote will make it go. But it would be better if there was a bed in it.

[*Enter* STAGE MANAGER.]

STAGE MANAGER

Now, Miss Perkins. I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting. Now. "A Girl On Her Own." You're both in this, so we can get started. Miss Esmer will be here in five minutes. Now. Curtain up!

PHYLLIS [*in bed, and looking charming. Reading from script*]

"Count, this is charming of you."

CURTAIN

IN HOLY RUSSIA

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Marya Nicolaevna.
Anna Petrovna.
Ivan Michailovitch.
Alexey.
Zerstchin.
Alcohol.
A Policeman of Niboleskaya.

IN HOLY RUSSIA

Scene

Outside a Russian cottage. A table and chairs stand before the little cottage. The housewife [Marya Nicolaevna] *is tidying it.*

Time: Russia about 1912.

[*Enter another peasant-woman, the neighbour.*]

Marya

Why, Anna Petrovna, an angel has sent you.

Anna

Well, Marya Nicolaevna, I came to talk.

Marya

Surely an angel sent you, for I needed a talk so much.

Anna

Ah, often I feel like that. And then I must talk. I must. And if the men are away I just talk to myself.

MARYA

Oh, one should not do that.

ANNA

No?

MARYA

No. For an evil spirit might hear, and think that you spoke to him.

ANNA

I should not like that.

MARYA

No. He would answer then.

ANNA

That would be dreadful. But we have each other to talk to now.

MARYA

Yes. Let us talk of all things. But fast, for my nephew Ivan will be here soon to speak with his friend Alexey from Tobolsk, and young Zerstchin. You know of what they speak?

ANNA

No.

MARYA

It is of politics.

ANNA

Of politics!

MARYA

Yes, they say wonderful things. Their talk is all strange like a dream, and it makes my heart beat faster.

ANNA

What do they say?

MARYA

Oh, I know not. Strange words, strange sayings, and many things not true. I know not what they mean, but I know it's politics. It's very strange to hear them: it is like something quite different.

ANNA

Do they speak of change?

MARYA

Yes. Of things quite different.

ANNA

God does not wish that.

MARYA

No, nor the Czar. Yet their talk thrills me. There are new words in their mouths. And though I know not their meaning, it sets me thinking of strange new things. You shall hear them Anna.

ANNA

Not here! Not politics in the open daylight and just by the road that runs through Nibol-eskaya.

MARYA

Ah. But they are so cunning. None knows what they talk of.

ANNA

If they see three men talking together, they may suspect.

MARYA

No. For they are cunning. Alexey has lived in Tobolsk and seen the wide world, and knows things that they would not dream of in Nibol-eskaya. It is his plan. They have a box of images that I keep for them. And they set them all up on the table, and play with them for all the world like children. And if the police come by they think they are playing.

ANNA

Playing? But, Marya, the police will never think big men like your nephew are children.

MARYA

Ah. That is the strange thing. Yet so it is. Alexey has learned it in Tobolsk. Grown men, it seems, work their brains over those images, aye, and will beat their foreheads with their fists, and will sit and gaze at them all day. It is strange, but so it is, and the world is full of strange customs.

ANNA

Strange indeed. And will the police in Niboleskaya know this custom?

MARYA

They know of it; though they know not how to play with the images. Alexey says that, for that, they are all the readier to smile on the images and to appear to comprehend the ways of them.

ANNA

I like not playing with images.

MARYA

Why not?

ANNA

It may bring bad luck.

MARYA

Bad luck? Will it come to us?

ANNA

Not this year, I think, for it is a lucky year, and we will have a beautiful harvest.

MARYA

God be praised. How do you know?

ANNA

The beans are in double rows in the pods this year. I have seen twenty such.

MARYA

Are they indeed?

ANNA

Yes. It is a portent.

MARYA

Look. Here they come. I must get the queer box.

[*Exit into cottage.*]

[*Enter* IVAN, *followed by* ALEXEY *and Zerstchin.*]

IVAN

Well, neighbour. How do you prosper?

ANNA

Well, thank you, Ivan Michailovitch, for we are to have a great harvest this year. There are double rows in the bean-pods.

IVAN

Ah, yes. You would know by that.

ANNA

Certainly, Ivan Michailovitch. God put them there for that purpose.

IVAN

Ah, to be sure He does.

[*Enter* MARYA *with a chess-board and box of large chessmen. She puts board and box on the table.*]

MARYA

Well, Ivan, I've brought you your images.

IVAN

Thank you, Aunt Marya.

MARYA

You wouldn't like me to help you with them?

IVAN

No, no. [*He turns to his silent, serious, preoccupied companions and they set up handfuls of chessmen haphazard upon the board.* IVAN *and* ALEXEY (*from* TOBOLSK) *sit down at opposite ends of the board.*] Now we can talk.

ALEXEY

No, not yet. Sit you down, Zerstchin, there. Now; there are two men playing chess and one watching. What more natural? We may talk.

IVAN

Tell him, then, of the future of Russia. He has not heard.

ALEXEY [*to* ZERSTCHIN]

You are ready to work for Russia?

ZERSTCHIN

I yearn to see Holy Russia free.

ALEXEY

Learn first, then, to speak of "Holy Russia" no more. It was that in the past, and all the past is bad. We shall only be free by escaping from it utterly. The past will try to bind you with old customs, will reach out hands to clutch

you, will bring chains to fasten you down; and old customs and chains and hands must all be broken. What the past made holy must be unholy now, and only what none dared speak of hitherto shall be holy, things of which none dared think. It is only by this that we shall be free.

ZERSTCHIN [*eagerly*]

Tell me how we shall free Russia.

ALEXEY

Each man shall teach ten men every week. And of those ten he shall choose one, also to be a teacher. Thus, wherever there was one teacher on Monday, at the end of that week there shall be two, and every teacher teaching ten more.

IVAN

No, no, that will be too long. Let them find a new teacher every day.

ZERSTCHIN

Yes. Then we shall soon be free

ALEXEY

No. If we have but fifty teachers now, and double them every week, we shall have six or seven million in four months.

ZERSTCHIN

Six or seven million!

ALEXEY

Aye, and nearer ten million.

ZERSTCHIN

It is wonderful.

ALEXEY

We shall do it.

ZERSTCHIN

And then. In four months' time?

ALEXEY

Then we shall wait a little longer.

ZERSTCHIN

And then?

ALEXEY

Then we shall have taught that the sceptre that men go in fear of is only a bar of gold, and that there is nothing more in that than there is in lead. That the sanctity of the Czar and his sceptre are but dreams from which men may waken as they waken from others. We shall waken them with a whisper. We shall waken

them in the golden future and the dream will be all gone, and Russia will be happy again as free birds are happy at dawn.

IVAN

Will all awaken?

ZERSTCHIN

Yes, surely.

ALEXEY

No. There will be those that will not hear our voices. Heavy minds that would sleep on though all the birds were singing. Against these we shall teach the holiness of assassination. For things shall be holy that were not holy before, and things unholy that were holy of old. It will be for the sake of Russia. When these are gone all shall be free.

ZERSTCHIN [*ecstatically*]

Russia free!

ALEXEY

Yes, for all that live will be those with freedom in their hearts. How should these oppress any? And all the old oppressions will be gone. They will have all been sacrificed to Freedom.

ZERSTCHIN

And we shall all be free?

ALEXEY

Free as the birds that sing. And then we shall live in a State planned by sensible, reasoning men, not made by the chance absurdities and violences of uncivilized ages. We shall . . . Your move, Ivan.

[*They bend over the chessboard. The village* POLICEMAN *walks across.*]

POLICEMAN

Chess, Ivan Michailovitch?

[*But* IVAN, *deep over the game, does not answer.*]

ALEXEY

Yes.

POLICEMAN

A clever game. A very excellent game.

[*Exit.*]

ALEXEY

We shall have none of those folk.

IVAN

A few, perhaps, to enforce our free laws!

ALEXEY

No! Why do Russians break the law? Because it is not *their* law. It is not the law of a free people, but the law of a tyranny that they detest. When the tyranny is gone, and the laws are the people's own, made by themselves and for each other, what Russian will ever break them?

IVAN

See, Zerstchin; you are learning. You shall hear the constitution of the new Russia.

ZERSTCHIN

Yes, it is wonderful.

ALEXEY

And then none will have any desire to break the new laws, even if free Russians could be found to do it, for all will be so rich that they'll be content.

ZERSTCHIN

We'll all be rich, Alexey?

IVAN

Yes, listen, and you shall hear.

ALEXEY

Yes, there is enough of gold and jewellery in the imperial palaces alone to feed all the people of Russia for a year, even if they did no work for the whole of that time. But they *will* work, and for themselves: there will be no rent to any landlord, and no interest to be paid on any borrowed money, for we shall abolish capitalism. The wealth of Russia will be for the people of Russia. It is boundless; it is enormous. We have worked it all out, and we have found that every peasant will be as wealthy, all his life, as any lawyer or priest or doctor in a large provincial town. And furthermore there will be no taxes, or very few.

IVAN

That is because there will be no army or navy to maintain. Is it not, Alexey?

ALEXEY

Only at first, until other nations have learned from us not to desire to make war.

ZERSTCHIN

But if any do break the laws of free Russia, what then, Alexey?

ALEXEY

If any do? Why, if any do, we shall put them in pleasant schools. Not in Siberian prisons like the imperialists. And in those schools we shall teach them until they can know their error. Then we shall free them and they will go back better citizens than the rest, for we shall have trained them in all civic things.

ZERSTCHIN

It will be a glorious time.

ALEXEY

Ah, you say that when I tell you how rich we shall all be.

ZERSTCHIN [*ecstatically*]

No. I say it because Russia will be free.

IVAN

Come. We will drink to that day. Marya Nicolaevna! Marya Nicolaevna!

MARYA

I come, Ivan.

IVAN

Will you give us some vodka, Aunt?

MARYA

Vodka, so early?

IVAN

We wish to drink to a very glorious day.

MARYA

Oh, your politics.

IVAN

Our politics will free Russia.

MARYA

They make my heart beat faster.
[*Exit into house.*]

ZERSTCHIN

Russia will be free.

IVAN

Yes, we will drink to that day.

ZERSTCHIN

I will not drink.

IVAN

Why not?

ZERSTCHIN

I want to think of those glorious days. I want to think with clear brains of the freedom of Russia; the rule of reason, and freedom for all. The glory of it warms me so that I want no drink.

ALEXEY

Nonsense. We will drink to the day that is coming. It will make it seem nearer.

ZERSTCHIN

I do not need it. The glory of those days is enough for me.

IVAN

Here comes Marya Nicolaevna with the vodka. We will all drink. We shall be able to work the better for it.

ZERSTCHIN

No.

IVAN

One drink.

ZERSTCHIN

Well, one then, and no more.

ALEXEY

Yes, that is all we need. We must keep our brains clear for they have to free Russia.

MARYA [*to* ANNA]

The strange things they are saying.

ANNA

Yes. Yes. God send no ill come of them.

MARYA

Ill? I trust not.

[*Exeunt* MARYA *and* ANNA.]

ZERSTCHIN

This is good stuff.

IVAN

Have another.

ZERSTCHIN

Well, one more, but only one more. Then I will leave you, or I shall drink too much. I want to think of free Russia and all the golden days. [IVAN *pours.*] Too much. Too much. You've poured out too much.

IVAN

You needn't drink it all.

ZERSTCHIN

I'll sit over there and think. If I stay with you here, soon I shan't be able to. [*He goes away with his glass and sits on a tree-stump (Stage R.) by footlights.*] The golden days!

[*He sips the vodka. The lights lower slightly. He sips it again: a thin gauze descends between him and the others. Again he sips, and again a thin gauze. Once more: and again a gauze, until all is misty white between him and the rest of the stage. Then a brilliant harlequin in his jazz-bright tights leaps up beside him in sunlight.*]

ZERSTCHIN

Who are you?

THE FIGURE

Alcohol.

ZERSTCHIN

Alco-what?

ALCOHOL

Alcohol. An old, old family. You know our motto: *In vino veritas.*

ZERSTCHIN

In vino . . . ?

ALCOHOL

Look!

[*He waves with his harlequin's sword and the gauzes disappear, all but one thin film. All is bright sunlight.* ALEXEY *is gone,* IVAN *is sitting at the same table but his head and arms are fallen upon it, a bit of a gnawed twig lies by his hand.* MARYA *and* ANNA, *lying upon the ground, are trying to gnaw the bark of twigs, or eat pieces of grass. The* POLICEMAN *leans hopeless against a tree. The misery of all shows they are starving. The thatch of the house, etc., have become unkempt.*]

ZERSTCHIN

Starving!

ALCOHOL [*cheerfully*]

Yes.

ZERSTCHIN

What! In Russia?

ALCOHOL

Yes. Here in Russia.

ZERSTCHIN

Oh! [ALCOHOL, *leaning against tree by* ZERSTCHIN, *toys with his harlequin's sword*

and watches the starving people.] No, but this shall not be. Folks must not starve in Russia. I'll give them money to buy bread. I've a hundred-rouble note. And I can get more. They shall not starve in Russia. Here, good folk. [*He steps towards them with his rouble note outstretched.*] Here. [*But he comes against the gauze, and both hands grope at it, though he does not actually touch it, and he can get no further. None of them see him.*]

ALCOHOL

You cannot. It is too far.

ZERSTCHIN

Too far?

ALCOHOL

Yes, this is Russia of 1920.

ZERSTCHIN

The future! What can I do?

ALCOHOL

You have done all you can do.

ZERSTCHIN

I?

ALCOHOL

Look!

ZERSTCHIN [*with his hundred-rouble note still held out childishly towards them. Plaintively.*]
I want to give them my money.

ALCOHOL
Look!

MARYA [*to* IVAN, *pulling at his shoulder*]
Ivan, Ivan. Arouse yourself.

IVAN [*turning his head without raising it*]
Why?

MARYA
We must find food at once.

IVAN [*contemptuously*]
Food? Where?

MARYA
Listen and I will tell you. Listen, Ivan.

IVAN
Let me sleep.

MARYA
Listen, Ivan. Ony listen. There is food in Niboleskaya.

IVAN [*incredulously*]

In Niboleskaya?

MARYA

Not so loud. Listen, Ivan.

IVAN

Well.

MARYA [*with the air of a secret*]

Yesterday Skoboleff opened a tin of sprats. It is known. It came from England. He ate two or three, not more; but they smelt bad and he stopped eating them. There must be nine sprats in that tin now: there were twelve. Take your money, and go and buy them.

IVAN

I have no money, but these [*showing four notes*].

MARYA

How much?

IVAN

Four thousand roubles. You can't buy all those sprats for four thousand roubles.

MARYA

They smelt very bad, little Ivan. Perhaps Skoboleff will sell.

[ZERSTCHIN, *dropping his rouble note, hides his face in sudden despair. The scene darkens till nothing is visible but* ZERSTCHIN *sobbing.* ALCOHOL *has lain down to rest. And then above the sound of* ZERSTCHIN *sobbing comes a yawn of the most intense boredom. It is* ALCOHOL *awakening. He is now dressed all in grey.* ALCOHOL *rises slowly, yawning. He is scarcely able to lift his weight. He walks away, leaning heavily on trees; not of course drunkenly, but wearily. Exit. The earlier scene comes back again. It is once more* RUSSIA *of about* 1912, *with* IVAN *and* ALEXEY *seated at the table.* MARYA *and* ANNA *enter gossiping to each other.*]

ZERSTCHIN [*drying his tears as the light brightens*]

Ah! I will save them yet. [*He rises and goes over to* ALEXEY *and* IVAN.] Friends. Friends. A moment before you decide. Alexey, a moment.

ALEXEY

Well?

ZERSTCHIN

If in the changes you make you affect our commerce. Suppose you injure its delicate organization. And our finance. What if the sudden change harms that?

ALEXEY

I told you. I shall make the people rich.

ZERSTCHIN

Yes, Alexey, yes. Yes, certainly. But what if the sudden change injure our credit? What if the rouble should lose its value, when we want to buy food.

MARYA

Still at their politics.

ANNA

Ah, well. Let the men talk as well as us.

[MARYA *laughs.*]

ALEXEY

I will deal with that point.

IVAN

Alexey has studied all that.

ZERSTCHIN

Yes, I know, Ivan. I know. And yet . . .

ALEXEY

I will deal with that point. If any unfavourable influence should affect the purchasing value of the rouble, which is not to be anticipated, but in case it should, the People's Central Revolutionary Banks will in that case so regulate the deflation of currency, that . . .

CURTAIN

HIS SAINTED GRANDMOTHER

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PHYLLIS TRAVERNE.
HER FATHER.
LUCY.
ANNIE.

HIS SAINTED GRANDMOTHER

Scene

An old room with a four-poster in the middle. Wainscot *about seven feet high. A fire-place on the left-hand side* [*Stage left*], *at which* Phyllis, *when she sits about the middle of the left side of the bed, can easily warm her hands. Nearer the footlights a door in the left-hand side. A dressing-table in the middle of the right side.*

[*Enter* Phyllis Traverne, *followed by her* Father.]

Phyllis

But, Father, I don't like this room.

Her Father

I have had your things put here.

Phyllis

But I don't like it.

Her Father

Why?

PHYLLIS

Nobody likes it.

HER FATHER

Do they give any reason?

PHYLLIS

It is so old.

HER FATHER

It's in good enough repair.

PHYLLIS

Oh, I don't mean that. But it's not for us.

HER FATHER

Not for us? What do you mean?

PHYLLIS

Why, it's all made for people a long time ago. Dead people. Not like us. It's full of their needs, their ways, and their awful faces. Don't make me sleep in it!

HER FATHER

Do you call that an awful face?

[*Points at the portrait, with its crinolines and its sainted expression.*]

PHYLLIS

No, only I, only . . .

HER FATHER

What?

PHYLLIS

It's full of their ways.

HER FATHER

Very well then, I'll come to that at once.

PHYLLIS

Come to that, Father?

HER FATHER

Yes. I have put you here with good reason.

PHYLLIS

Good reason? Why?

HER FATHER

If you could possibly draw any influence out of the shadows of this old room, its hangings, its furniture, above all that portrait, from those sane and sober ways you so much despise; if you could find *anything* of a bygone grace, both of spirit and body, from this quiet gloom that is laden with memories of my grandmother, you might—well, all I can say is, you might be the better for it.

PHYLLIS

In what way, Father?

HER FATHER

Do you want me to explain myself?

PHYLLIS

It's awfully late, Father.

HER FATHER

I trust not too late.

PHYLLIS

What do you mean by that?

HER FATHER

I will explain.

PHYLLIS

Oh, well.

[*So she sits on bed and lights a cigarette.*]

HER FATHER

One should not need to have to explain. Well, to begin with, there is this young fellow Shawley.

PHYLLIS

Peter?

HER FATHER

Oh, you call him Peter then?

PHYLLIS

Of course.

HER FATHER

Well, Peter, then. How many times did you dance with Peter to-night?

PHYLLIS

Seven.

HER FATHER

Why?

PHYLLIS

There was nobody else there I wanted to dance with. And he didn't want to dance with anyone else either. Only there was a woman there he couldn't avoid dancing with. You don't know or, or you'd understand; but there it was. So we only danced seven, otherwise I'd have danced . . .

HER FATHER

Seven. And in my day if a man danced more than three times with the same girl, it was tantamount, why it amounted to . . .

PHYLLIS

But I like dancing with Peter.

HER FATHER

Evidently.

PHYLLIS

Then why shouldn't I?

HER FATHER

To *begin* with, to begin with because you make yourself conspicuous.

PHYLLIS

But who to, Father?

HER FATHER

To the whole room.

PHYLLIS

But, Father, mayn't the times change?

HER FATHER

Not seven times with the same partner.

PHYLLIS

Lots of them dance with one partner all the evening.

HER FATHER

In my time that would have been tantamount to an engagement, and would have been taken as such by everybody.

PHYLLIS

But, Father, mayn't the times change?

HER FATHER

Yes, in externals. Fashions must change, and customs, and even perhaps manners, though it is unfortunate that they all change for the worse. But there are things that surely must shock all the right-minded people in any age as much as they would have shocked my sainted grandmother, who seems to watch you now so sorrowfully.

PHYLLIS

But, Father, who can object? [*A glance, almost of fear, at the portrait.*] I mean, who that's living to-day and knows our ways can object to my dancing seven dances with Peter?

HER FATHER

Young Arnold.

PHYLLIS [*lowers her cigarette and thinks a little gravely for a second*]

What? Dick?

HER FATHER

You call him Dick, then?

PHYLLIS

Well, we all do.

HER FATHER

Then what does Dick think of it?

PHYLLIS

It isn't his business.

HER FATHER

I see, so his business is limited to taking you out in his motor-launch whenever you want sea air, or to driving you a hundred miles from here, and back again the same evening, all alone together, a thing inconceivable in her time [*pointing to portrait*] . . .

PHYLLIS

They hadn't motors, Father.

HER FATHER

They had morals.

PHYLLIS

Oh, well.

HER FATHER

And that isn't all; this Dick of yours has to get you tickets for any theatre you want, has to do all kinds of odd jobs for you, and actually has had more than once to hang about with his motor on the chance that you might want him to take you to other people's tennis-parties.

PHYLLIS

Oh, well, it rained that day, Father.

HER FATHER

It wasn't the only day.

PHYLLIS

Father, is it *really* wrong?

HER FATHER

Really wrong! Good heavens, how shall I answer it? Only by placing you, as I have placed you, in such contact as may touch you here from a godlier age, in a room whose very shadows are hallowed with the long association of a calm and sainted lady. If no influence of hers can reach you here to tell you that in all ages and places it is wrong to have one man to amuse you all day and dance half the night with another, then you are indeed lost. Good-night.

[*Exit.*]

PHYLLIS

Oh, dear me.

[*She sits a few moments in thought, knocking off cigarette-ash into an ash-tray, then throws the end of the cigarette into the fire-place and rises and goes across to her dressing-table, looking at the great four-poster as she passes it, and giving a shudder at the gloomy old room. She sits down at her dressing-table to do her hair, or what not, and sighs. Then over on the far side of the four-poster, whence she had come, the ghost of her great-grandmother is seen, without any appearance (where practicable) of having entered or moved.* PHYLLIS, *turning round after a while, stares and cranes her head nearer, from her chair, not only in fright, but because the ghost is a little dim.*]

PHYLLIS

Great-grandmamma.

[*The* GHOST *nods its head twice.* PHYLLIS *pauses, gives way to fear, runs to bell, and pulls it hard.*]

GHOST

Don't do that, dear.

PHYLLIS

I've done it.

GHOST

Never mind.

[*Looks at door and gives a little laugh.*]

PHYLLIS

Great-grandmamma, are you angry with me?

GHOST

No, child.

PHYLLIS

Great-grandmamma.

GHOST

Yes, child.

PHYLLIS

You're quite young.

GHOST

Yes.

[*A little laugh.*]

PHYLLIS

But you were quite old, great-grandmamma. You didn't look like that.

GHOST

Oh, that was only my body. But I was like this always.

PHYLLIS

Then what made you old, great-grandmamma?

GHOST

Oh, that was the spirit wearing the body out. It wears it quite out in the end.

PHYLLIS

Great-grandmamma.

GHOST

Don't call me great-grandmamma.

PHYLLIS

Er, sainted spirit.

GHOST

Call me Lucy.

PHYLLIS

Oh. [*Smiles.*] Well, Lucy, are you quite sure you aren't angry with me?

GHOST

Mercy no, child.

PHYLLIS

Not about Dick and Peter?

GHOST [*interested*]

Dick and Peter? Tell me about them.

PHYLLIS

Well, you see, Peter—Peter's wonderful; I like him ever so much. He's—I can't explain, but he's marvellous. More than anyone else in the world I should think. Well, anyway, he's perfectly wonderful. But, of course, he hasn't any money. He'll make some in a year or two, because he's so wonderful. He's at the bar, and he'll make a lot one day. But it's a bit dull waiting. So then, you see, there's Dick. [GHOST *titters.*] He's got lots of money. And he likes taking girls out in his—in his barouche, you know. And he doesn't care much who he takes so long as they're pretty. So it may just as well be me, mayn't it, Lucy? But you know what Papa is. [GHOST *laughs.*] You aren't angry with me, are you? I'm so glad, Lucy dear.

GHOST

And what does your Papa say?

PHYLLIS

Oh, well, *he says*—he says, if only you could teach me better ways.

GHOST

Oh, it was he that was invoking me then. I thought it was you.

PHYLLIS

Invoking you, Lucy?

GHOST

This old place was calling me so strongly.

PHYLLIS

I'm so glad you came.

GHOST

I had to.

PHYLLIS

Had to, Lucy?

GHOST

Yes, the pull of old places, you know. And then when anyone stirs it at all, as he was do-

ing, it begins to draw you at once, and back you come.

PHYLLIS

Lucy, Lucy, may I ask you something?

GHOST

Yes, anything you like, child.

PHYLLIS

Then, Lucy, where do you come from?

GHOST

Come from? From over there.

PHYLLIS

Over there? What's it like, Lucy?

GHOST

Oh, I can't stop all night in a tiny place like Earth to explain all that to you.

PHYLLIS

Can't you, Lucy? Well, do tell me one thing that really matters. Do tell me what I ought to do about Peter and Dick. I can't find out from Father, he gets so angry. And Dick's such a silly ass he can't tell one anything. I've no one else to ask.

GHOST

Well, my dear, if I were you . . .

PHYLLIS

Yes, Lucy.

GHOST

Well, I'd stick to Peter.

PHYLLIS

Oh, would you, Lucy?

GHOST

Yes, and meanwhile——

PHYLLIS

Yes, Lucy.

GHOST

While you're waiting, I mean. . . . You say Dick has a barouche.

PHYLLIS

Oh, yes, Lucy. A great big . . . I mean a nice fast one.

GHOST

Well, I always preferred a phaeton. They're smarter.

PHYLLIS

Well, he has a phaeton too. It's a Rolls, really, but you wouldn't quite understand that.

GHOST

A Rolls?

PHYLLIS

A new maker.

GHOST

No, he wasn't a carriage-builder in my time. I expect the old firms are the best.

PHYLLIS

Yes, I suppose they are. What were you saying about Dick?

GHOST

Oh, well, if he has a smart phaeton, there's nothing like a nice drive in the country. And then, of course, the less you compromise yourself the pleasanter it is to look back on.

PHYLLIS

Compromise myself, Lucy?

GHOST

Yes. One wouldn't choose for an outing villages where you might be known, or any

large village at all. And then there are some quite becoming bonnets that can satisfactorily conceal your identity if you do meet people that . . .

PHYLLIS

We don't wear bonnets now, Lucy.

GHOST

Oh, well, a pretty parasol, if held adroitly, can be a complete protection.

PHYLLIS

Oh, what a lot you know, Lucy.

GHOST

I was here for eighty years.

PHYLLIS

Yes, I suppose you were. But hasn't it altered a good deal since?

GHOST

I don't know. But it hadn't altered much up to my time.

PHYLLIS

What? Not ever?

GHOST

Well, I don't suppose so, child.

PHYLLIS

But Lucy, about Dick. I've sometimes wondered what would happen if Peter hears that I am always about with him. You know so much, I'm sure you can advise me.

GHOST

Let him hear, child. But always in moderation. Let him hear.

PHYLLIS

Let him hear?

GHOST

He mustn't think he's the only fish in the sea.

PHYLLIS

But he is, for me. And I wouldn't mind if he knew.

GHOST

Oh, no, that would never do.

PHYLLIS

Wouldn't it? He's awfully fond of me.

GHOST

But you want to keep him so.

PHYLLIS

Oh, yes.

GHOST

Well, there's nothing like letting him know he might lose you.

PHYLLIS

Oh, Lucy, do you really think so?

GHOST

My dear child, I was here eighty years.

PHYLLIS

I—I suppose you're right.

GHOST

Of course I'm right, child.

PHYLLIS

But, Lucy, you led such a—such a sainted life.

[GHOST *titters. A knock is heard on the door.*]

PHYLLIS

Oh! Er—don't come in.

[*A housemaid's head, in curl-papers, looks in. She is in nightdress and carries a candle. She comes in no further and* PHYLLIS *is able to conceal the* GHOST.]

ANNIE

Mr. Traverne wanted to know what you rang for, Miss.

PHYLLIS

Oh, nothing. Nothing at all.

ANNIE

Nothing, Miss?

PHYLLIS

No, no. Just nothing.

ANNIE

Then there's nothing you want, Miss?

PHYLLIS

No, thank you, Annie. Nothing at all. Really.

ANNIE

All right, Miss. I'll tell Mr. Traverne.

[*Exit.*]

PHYLLIS

Oh! Lucy, do you mind if I smoke?

GHOST [*laughs*]

No, child.

PHYLLIS

Why are you laughing, Lucy?

GHOST

I smoked once.

PHYLLIS

You, Lucy? [*Looks at portrait.*] Did you really?

GHOST

Yes. There was a bit of a fuss. But I *smoked.*

PHYLLIS

Oh, Lucy. Is there anything you didn't do?
[*She lights up.*]

GHOST

Well, of course, eighty years isn't long.

PHYLLIS

No, I suppose it isn't, really.

GHOST

But whatever one can do in eighty years, I did.

PHYLLIS

Oh, Lucy, you must know a lot more than Father. [GHOST *laughs.*] Lucy, do tell me more about what I ought to do.

GHOST

Have a good time, child.

PHYLLIS

Oh, Lucy, and what else?

GHOST

That's all.

PHYLLIS

Then, Lucy, perhaps you think I ought to marry Dick. He's got tons of money.

GHOST

Not a bit of it. You'd have a wretched time.

PHYLLIS

Why, Lucy?

GHOST

Because you want Peter.

PHYLLIS

Yes, I do.

GHOST

Well, you get him then.

PHYLLIS

Oh, Lucy, how nice you are.

GHOST

I'm sure Peter's a nice young man.

PHYLLIS

Oh, yes, Lucy, he is.

GHOST

But I'm sure he hasn't such nice whiskers as . . . oh, well, never mind now.

PHYLLIS

Well, they don't wear whiskers now, Lucy; nothing to speak of.

GHOST

Not wear whiskers! Oh, well, I've no doubt they're nice boys even if they do look frights.

PHYLLIS

Peter doesn't look a fright, Lucy. Well, not quite, you know.

GHOST

Well, never mind, child, I must go now.

PHYLLIS

Oh, Lucy.

GHOST

Yes, I must go back over there.

PHYLLIS

Oh, Lucy, you've hardly told me anything.

GHOST

I must go back. I can't stay here much longer.

PHYLLIS

Oh, Lucy, why not?

GHOST

It's all so tiny. It's like fastening your eyes on a line of a page of a little book in a room, when summer's outside. But you won't understand that yet.

PHYLLIS

I think I can see what you mean, Lucy. But do stay a little longer. Just tell me what I should do for a little while.

GHOST

Spend Dick's money for him, if he wants you to.

PHYLLIS

Yes, Lucy?

GHOST

Have a good time. And then one day give Peter a good time.

PHYLLIS

Yes, Lucy, and then?

GHOST

Why then, one day you come to us.

PHYLLIS

But, Lucy, what if Peter won't have me?

[GHOST *gets dimmer.*]

GHOST [*sleepily*]

What do you say, child?

PHYLLIS

Lucy, Lucy, don't go yet. What if Peter won't have me?

GHOST

Who's Peter?

PHYLLIS

Lucy, come back. Tell me what to do about Peter.

[GHOST *brightens again.*]

GHOST

Oh, Peter, yes. Tell him from me . . .

PHYLLIS

From you, Lucy?

GHOST

Yes, tell him from me, that if he isn't good to you, I'll haunt him.

PHYLLIS

Oh, Lucy, that is good of you.

GHOST

Good-bye now, child.

[*She begins to fade. A heavy knock is heard.*]

PHYLLIS

That's Papa.

[GHOST *brightens again and titters. Enter* TRAVERNE. *The* GHOST *folds demure hands and turns up pious eyes as in portrait.*]

HER FATHER

What was all that noise you were making with the . . .

GHOST

Obey your dear father in all things and order your ways reverently.

PHYLLIS

Yes, great-grandmamma.

GHOST

You understand, my dear?

PHYLLIS

Yes, Lucy.

[GHOST *vanishes.*]

HER FATHER [*recovering from wainscot, against which he had reeled*]

I trust, I trust you have had a lesson.

[PHYLLIS *bursts into laughter.* HER FATHER *runs for the smelling-salts, takes out the stopper, and comes towards her with it.*

CURTAIN

THE HOPELESS PASSION OF MR. BUNYON

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Mr. Muffen.

Mr. Bunyon.

Miss Sleggit.

THE HOPELESS PASSION OF MR. BUNYON

SCENE

The interior of a shop. MR. BUNYON *seated at a table gazing out at the ridiculous wax figure in the shop-window. A brass curtain-rail is between him and the figure, but the curtains are both drawn back.*

[*Enter the shopkeeper,* MR. MUFFEN.]

MUFFEN

Mr. Bunyon. [BUNYON *continues his gazing.*] Mr. Bunyon. [BUNYON *still gazing.*] Mr. Bunyon.

BUNYON

Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.

MUFFEN

Oh, it's nothing of any importance.

BUNYON

But I'm listening, sir.

MUFFEN

Oh, please go on gazing out of the window.

BUNYON [*hastily closes window curtains*]
But what was it, sir?

MUFFEN

Nothing of any importance.

BUNYON

Yes, sir?

MUFFEN

Only you're sacked.

BUNYON

Sacked, sir? Oh, no, sir.

MUFFEN

Oh, yes, sir.

BUNYON

But why, sir?

MUFFEN

Always gazing out of the window.

BUNYON [*who has been sitting neglecting an account book*]
I'll finish this off in a moment, sir. I really will.

MUFFEN

'Tisn't only that. Always drawing the curtains back the way you do, people can see inside.

BUNYON

But there's, there's not any harm in that. Is there?

MUFFEN

We do business in here. That's not a thing to be looked at.

BUNYON

I won't never do it any more, sir.

MUFFEN

You won't!

BUNYON

I won't really, sir.

MUFFEN

No, you're sacked.

BUNYON

I came for a very low wage. I took a very low wage indeed.

MUFFEN

I don't care.

BUNYON

You'll never get anyone to do the work for so little, sir.

MUFFEN

Daresay not, but I'm tired of it. Always looking out of the window.

BUNYON

Well, I'll tell you what, sir.

MUFFEN

You're sacked. See?

BUNYON

I'll tell you what, sir. I'll work with you for nothing.

MUFFEN

What do you mean?

BUNYON

For no wages at all.

MUFFEN

For nothing at all?

BUNYON

Yes, nothing, if you'll only keep me.

MUFFEN

Well, I'll think over it.

BUNYON

You'll do it, sir?

MUFFEN

I didn't say I'd do it. I must know what you're getting at.

BUNYON

What I'm getting at, sir?

MUFFEN

Yes, what you're getting at.

BUNYON

I'm getting at nothing.

MUFFEN

You aren't going to stop here and work for no wages!

BUNYON

Yes, I am, sir.

MUFFEN

Why?

BUNYON

Oh, I don't know, sir.

MUFFEN

Then I don't accept your terms.

BUNYON

You don't accept them, sir?

MUFFEN

No.

BUNYON

Not when I do all your work for nothing?

MUFFEN

No. What's your game?

BUNYON

Oh, I—I couldn't tell you, sir.

MUFFEN

Then you're sacked.

BUNYON

Even if I work for nothing?

MUFFEN

Yes. I want to know why.

BUNYON

But, but what does it matter to you, sir?

MUFFEN

Never you mind. Well, if you must know; in business knowing the other man's game, it's worth, well, it's everything, there's nothing more *in* business besides that. If you don't tell me, you go.

BUNYON

Oh, do keep me, sir. Keep me for nothing.

MUFFEN

No.

BUNYON

Well, it's like this, sir.

MUFFEN

Well?

BUNYON

It's like this, sir. Oh, it will seem very silly to you. But, well you know, sir, every man has

his fancy. They go about and they meet them in one place or another. But I'm always here in the shop so much and hardly ever go out, so that one way and another I haven't had other people's opportunities, not so that I could make comparisons, and . . .

MUFFEN

Well?

BUNYON

Well, sir, the fact is, you see, the one in the window is the only one I really know, and——

MUFFEN

Well?

BUNYON

And so she's come to mean as much to me, much more really, as all the other young things that go about outside seem to be to other young men.

MUFFEN

You mean? What? That!

BUNYON

She is to me, sir.

MUFFEN

That?

BUNYON

She is to me, sir.

MUFFEN

But. What on earth can you find in a wax figure?

BUNYON

Oh, a lot, sir.

MUFFEN

But what?

BUNYON

Oh, I'm afraid you'd laugh at me, sir. But I see such a lot in her, sir.

MUFFEN

It.

BUNYON

I beg your pardon, sir. I mean It.

MUFFEN

Well, what can you see in it. That's what I want to know.

BUNYON

Well, sir. There's her colour, you know. It's colour, I should say. I do admire colour. And she's more colour, *it* I should say, than any of them. Her cheeks, *its* cheeks, I should say. And then the lips. They paint their lips a bit, sir, all of them, but they're none of them like hers. *Its,* sir, I mean to say. None of them.

MUFFEN

Well, I thought it was pretty natural. I don't know what fault you have to find with its lips.

BUNYON

Fault, sir. Oh no, sir. I shouldn't presume to find a fault. There's no fault to be found, sir. They're lovely, those lips. There's none like them, none in all London.

MUFFEN

There you go again. I tell you they're quite natural. They're just the colour that's worn now.

BUNYON

Oh, yes, sir. I know, sir. They're ũnique.

MUFFEN

Yes, that's what I've been telling you. But that's not enough to make you like this about her, *it,* I mean. I want to know what you see in it.

BUNYON

That wonderful colour, sir. [MUFFEN *opens his mouth.* BUNYON *continues hastily.*] But that's not all. No, sir, there's something far more than that. Oh, I could hardly tell you, sir.

MUFFEN

Go on. I want to know what on earth you think you can see in a wax figure, if you're speaking the truth.

BUNYON

The truth, sir. Oh, it's the truth. It's no fancy, sir, no young dream; it's the romance of my life, sir.

MUFFEN

Well, I want to know what on earth you think you can see in it.

BUNYON

Well, it's like this, sir: I haven't had much opportunities of seeing the real smart ones,

working in here as I do, and all that: and then when you brought her here, *it* I should say, I recognized all at once what it was about her that's so perfectly wonderful, sir. Why, you must see it yourself.

MUFFEN

I? I'm blowed if I do. I'm asking you.

BUNYON

Fashionableness, sir. That's what's the matter with her, *it* I should say. Fashionableness. She's got more fashionableness than anyone in the world. There isn't a queen so fashionable. Look at that sort of affected way she stands, and that simper, sir, if I may call it so; all pure fashionableness. I've never seen anyone like her.

MUFFEN

It.

BUNYON

It, I should say, sir.

MUFFEN

But look here, you know, it's all silly nonsense. I grant you it's fashionable, rather uniquely perhaps, and of course highly artistic.

BUNYON

Oh, very, sir.

MUFFEN

But you can't marry it. The idea's absurd.

BUNYON

I know I can't. Oh, I know I can't, sir. But not absurd, sir, on that account. I've done a bit of reading, sir: I have really. And, if you'll believe it, sir, there've been scores of cases of what's called hopeless passions. There have really, sir. Men have loved queens, sir; they really have. Just ordinary men, sir. And did they think anything could come of it? Well, I ask you. But they didn't give up their love, sir, not on that account.

MUFFEN

I don't say they did. I don't say they did. But what's all that got to do with it?

BUNYON

Well, sir, I won't give up, not when they wouldn't.

MUFFEN

You must be mad.

BUNYON

Ah, yes, sir. But how sweet it is, that madness. You'd never know.

MUFFEN

If you loved anything that could love you in return, why, that I admit would be another matter. But this——

BUNYON

Ah, that's where all the romance is, sir; that she can never love me in return. It's all the sweeter for that, sir. It's like the queens in those books. They admitted they were mad, the men I was telling you of; but they wouldn't give it up, they weren't crazy enough for that. It's the light of one's life, sir.

MUFFEN

Well, you'll have to get out of this. I can't have a madman here.

BUNYON

No, sir! No! I'll work for you for nothing. You said if I told you why I wanted to stay you'd keep me. You said you would, sir: you said it. And I've told you the story of my life. Let me stay and look at her, sir, working for

nothing. That fashionableness! Those brilliant lips!

MUFFEN

No, I can't keep a crazy fellow like you about the place. Why, it wouldn't be safe.

BUNYON

Oh, it would, sir.

MUFFEN

Not half it wouldn't. I've got the respectability of the firm to consider. Out you get.

BUNYON

Then let me see her once before I go.

MUFFEN

To say good-bye, do you mean?

BUNYON

To say farewell.

MUFFEN

You can do that from outside.

BUNYON

No, thousands see her from there. I have loved her at this angle.

MUFFEN

Oh, all right then, so long as you hop it.
[*He jerks curtain aside.*]

BUNYON

Star of my dream.

THE WAX FIGURE

Ow, reely, Mr. Bunyon.

MUFFEN

Miss Sleggit, I told you never to move. How often have I told you?

THE WAX FIGURE

Ow. I'm sorry, Mr. Muffen.

MUFFEN

Don't I pay you to stand in that window?

THE WAX FIGURE

Ow, yes, Mr. Muffen.

BUNYON

Alive!

THE WAX FIGURE

Ow, quite, Mr. Bunyon.

MUFFEN

Well, you're both sacked.

BUNYON

Shall we come along?

THE WAX FIGURE

Yes, let's, Mr. Bunyon.

MUFFEN

And I'll tell you one thing, Miss Sleggit. Yes, both of you. I'm going to buy a real one this time, whatever it costs.

THE WAX FIGURE

Good-bye, Mr. Muffen.

[*Strikes the absurd attitude of her work in the window.*]

BUNYON [*almost kneeling, stretching out adoring arms*]

Ah, what adorable fashionableness.

CURTAIN

THE JEST OF HAHALABA

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Sir Arthur Strangways.
Snaggs, *his butler.*
An Alchemist.
Hahalaba, *the Spirit of Laughter.*

THE JEST OF HAHALABA

Scene

The Smoking Room, Sir Arthur Strangways' house in London.

Time: The last moments of 1928. *Bells are ringing in the New Year.* Sir Arthur *is in an armchair.*

[*Enter* Snaggs, *his butler.*]

Sir Arthur

A happy New Year to you, Snaggs.

Snaggs

A happy New Year to you, Sir Arthur, and many of them.

Sir Arthur

Ah, thank you, Snaggs.

Snaggs

There's a man to see you, Sir Arthur, who . . .

Sir Arthur

Oh, yes, yes.

SNAGGS

. . . who says he wants to see you, Sir Arthur.

SIR ARTHUR

Yes, show him up, please.

SNAGGS

He's, if I may say so, Sir Arthur, a very strange person.

SIR ARTHUR

Yes, I know. Show him up.

SNAGGS

Very strange indeed.

SIR ARTHUR

Yes, I was expecting him.

SNAGGS

And it's very late, Sir Arthur.

SIR ARTHUR

Yes, never mind.

SNAGGS

As you wish, Sir Arthur

SIR ARTHUR

Yes, show him up, please.

SNAGGS

As you wish.

[*Exit, leaving* SIR ARTHUR *sitting thoughtful.*]

[*Re-enter with the* ALCHEMIST *in a dull maroon cloak, elderly, bearded, and dressed like nobody later than* TENIERS.]

SNAGGS

The man to see you, Sir Arthur.

[SNAGGS *lingers.*]

SIR ARTHUR

Thank you, Snaggs. Thank you.

SNAGGS [*reluctantly dismissed*]

Thank you, Sir Arthur.

SIR ARTHUR

You have the stuff? [ALCHEMIST *shows an old snuff-box and taps it, nodding his head.*] And the words?

ALCHEMIST [*in a sort of whisper*]

Yes.

[SIR ARTHUR *takes the snuff-box.*]

SIR ARTHUR [*extending hand*]
Give me the words.

ALCHEMIST

They may not be written.

[*Re-enter* SNAGGS.]

SNAGGS

I will wait up, Sir Arthur, in case you should ring. If you should ring I would come at once.

SIR ARTHUR

Thank you, snaggs. Thank you. [*Exit* SNAGGS. SIR ARTHUR *goes to door and locks it.*] You will tell me the words?

ALCHEMIST

There's laws in England against the likes of me.

SIR ARTHUR

Laws?

ALCHEMIST

Any time since the days of Edward the Confessor.

SIR ARTHUR

But you will tell me the words.

ALCHEMIST

Aye. But we must proceed softly.

SIR ARTHUR

All is quiet. We may start now.

ALCHEMIST

You have another door.

SIR ARTHUR

Oh, no one ever comes that way.

ALCHEMIST

It is better locked.

SIR ARTHUR

Perhaps it is. [*He locks it.*] Now.

ALCHEMIST

The powder then is placed upon the floor in a ring, wide enough to contain two feet, and two and a half times as wide should you dare to call up Eblis.

SIR ARTHUR

No, no. I shall not call up Eblis.

ALCHEMIST

That is something, Master. That is something. That is one thing to be thankful for in

all this bad business. I couldn't have borne it, Master. His mouth alone: I couldn't have borne to look at it.

SIR ARTHUR

No, no. I do not wish to see Eblis.

ALCHEMIST

I couldn't have borne to see him.

SIR ARTHUR

You shan't see him. Tell me the words.

ALCHEMIST

Well, Master, you put the powder in a ring, wide enough to hold common feet, scarce larger than ours. And then, Master, if you must, you light it. If you must, Master, if you must. And it smoulders and the smoke goes away to the left and the right, and goes round the ring. And just as the two smokes meet, just then you say [*he whispers*]. And you name the spirit that you would call up. And he must come. And he must grant one wish, the first demand that you make of him. And I wish I had never told you, and I wish I had never come.

SIR ARTHUR

Never mind that now. Let's get on with the business.

ALCHEMIST

Well, Master; then, there be many spirits. There's the spirit of Death, the spirit of Drought, the spirit of Fever.

SIR ARTHUR [*now preparing the ring*]
No, no. I'll have some jolly spirit.

ALCHEMIST

Oh, Master, call up the spirit of Death, the spirit of Fever, even the spirit of Terror, but not the spirit of Laughter.

SIR ARTHUR

The spirit of Laughter? Why not? I like the sound of him. We'll have the spirit of Laughter.

ALCHEMIST

Oh, Master, not that spirit.

SIR ARTHUR

Why not?

ALCHEMIST

Why, Master, because all these spirits, they are all at enmity with man, and are over full of ingenuity: it always was so. And they sit

for ages planning how to prevail against man. For ages, Master. You would hardly believe it. And when they have formed a plan they won't rest until they have tried it, you would not credit their malice. And most of all are they like this, most of all when they have been compelled to grant a wish. They are like it then most of all.

SIR ARTHUR

Then we won't have the spirit of Death.

ALCHEMIST

Oh, Master, the spirit of Laughter is the worst of all but one. His contrivances are beyond the wit of all the lesser spirits. You are not making the circle too wide, Master?

SIR ARTHUR

No, no. We'll only have the spirit of Laughter.

ALCHEMIST

Be warned, Master, and have none of him.

SIR ARTHUR

Come, tell me his name.

ALCHEMIST

Be warned, Master.

SIR ARTHUR

I've paid you well for this.

ALCHEMIST

Yes, Master, but be warned.

SIR ARTHUR

His name, then.

ALCHEMIST

His name, [oh, Master, call never upon this spirit,] his name is Hāhālābā.

SIR ARTHUR

So that's his name. The spell again.

[SIR ARTHUR *now holds a matchbox.* ALCHEMIST *whispers in his ear.* SIR ARTHUR *ignites the powder and mutters the spell, ending with the name* HAHALABA. HAHALABA *steps through a curtain and stands in the ring, an athletic spirit, with small cloak slung over dark nude breast.*]

HAHALABA

What is your will of me?

ALCHEMIST

Oh, Master, nothing that he can turn to his advantage.

SIR ARTHUR

It shall be nothing. I have thought of all.

ALCHEMIST

Only a trifle, master. Something too small for his contrivances, or . . .

SIR ARTHUR

It is only a trifle.

HAHALABA

What is your will of me?

SIR ARTHUR

Only a trifle. I wish to see a file of the *Times*.

HAHALABA

For what year?

SIR ARTHUR

For the year 1929.

ALCHEMIST

1929!

HAHALABA [*pulling cloth from table and revealing a file of one year of the* TIMES]

It is there.

SIR ARTHUR

Ha!

HAHALABA

Within an hour of midnight it will vanish.

SIR ARTHUR

Oh. We have not long then.

HAHALABA

It has far to go, and must be there by dawn.

SIR ARTHUR

Where?

HAHALABA

In the deeps of time
[*Exit*].

SIR ARTHUR

Where has he gone?

ALCHEMIST

He has gone back.

SIR ARTHUR

To work then.

ALCHEMIST [*as* SIR ARTHUR *gets half sheets and pencil and turns to the heap*]

Oh, Master, I'm glad you asked for a little thing. It's a mercy, Master, a mercy.

SIR ARTHUR

A *little* thing, indeed!

ALCHEMIST

Aye, Master. For had you asked a great thing of such as him, he would have triumphed surely.

SIR ARTHUR

A little thing!

ALCHEMIST

Aye, Master, I know the ways of them.

SIR ARTHUR

A little thing, be damned. I shall make millions on this. Millions.

ALCHEMIST

Oh, Master, beware Hahalaba. Beware the spirit of Laughter.

SIR ARTHUR

I tell you I shall make millions. This alone for instance, this alone: December 31st, 1929:

I see he's got December on the top the way the newspaper people keep it, they put the fresh paper on top of the one of the day before all the year round, and keep the lot like *this:* this number alone is worth all the money I've got, or you either. Patangas 104. You go down to the City and buy Patangas. But you don't understand.

ALCHEMIST

Master, I go to no city guided by Hahalaba.

SIR ARTHUR

He's got nothing to do with it. He's gone. But I read * in the *Times* that Patangas are 104. [*Jots down a word on half sheet, saying aloud "Patangas."*] I shall soon know if this file is genuine by waiting a few days and checking these. [*He lays his hand on the edges at bottom of heap*].

ALCHEMIST

Oh, it is genuine. He may not lie. But he is frivolous and cunning. I know Hahalaba.

SIR ARTHUR

If this is genuine [*reads a line or two*], as it evidently is, I shall make millions. There we are again, there we are again. Pocohontas 37.

* Present tense.

Who'd have thought it? I haven't paid you enough, old fellow. I haven't paid you enough.

ALCHEMIST

Master, I ask no more. I ask no more that comes from Hahalaba.

SIR ARTHUR

Nonsense. It comes out of the *Times*. And I'm the only man that's got a copy. November 20th this is, 1929. And the only one in the world. If you'd care for half a million you can have it. It will be nothing to me.

ALCHEMIST

No, Master. No.

SIR ARTHUR

Or a million for that matter.

ALCHEMIST

No, Master, I have no uses for it.

SIR ARTHUR

As you like. [*Lower down the file.*] And here again. Tangerines at 80. Hullo. Here's old Perrot dead. He should have kept himself fit: he was no older than me. If he'd have played golf. Well, well. October 27th.—

Fancy that. [*Takes another paper.*] Hullo, hullo. [*Makes brief note.*] I'll play hell with the Stock Exchange.

ALCHEMIST

Master.

SIR ARTHUR

Ha, ha! Lord! Bolivian United. Well, I never.

[*Makes note.*]

ALCHEMIST

Master.

SIR ARTHUR

And Ecuador Guaranteed. Millions!

ALCHEMIST

Master.

SIR ARTHUR

Well.

ALCHEMIST

I have given you your desire, and you have paid me well. Our account is settled. May I go hence?

SIR ARTHUR

Go hence? Yes, if you like.

ALCHEMIST

Thank you, Master; for of all spirits of evil I fear most the spirit of Laughter.

SIR ARTHUR

Yes, you told me that. No one's keeping you. But wait a moment. Wait a moment. There's one thing I'll give you that you'll understand how to use. Wait a moment.

ALCHEMIST

Master, I go not to that city.

SIR ARTHUR

No, it's not the City. Wait a moment. Ah, here we have it. The Derby. Aurelian won. You back Aurelian for the Derby. [*Writes on a half sheet and gives it to* ALCHEMIST.] There. Aurelian for the Derby.

ALCHEMIST

Master, I make no wager, lest in my hour of gain Hahalaba mock me. [*He puts paper down on a table.*] And Master——

SIR ARTHUR

Well, never mind now. There's only a few more minutes, and I can't waste them talking. They're worth a million a minute.

ALCHEMIST

As you will, Master.

SIR ARTHUR

Well, good-bye then, and thank you very much. [ALCHEMIST *tries the door, it is locked.*] Ah, the door. Give me a moment and I'll let you out. [*He takes key from pocket, but continues reading papers and making notes.*] Another of them. Tromkins now. Why can't they keep themselves fit? Mexican Airways Limited! Well, well. [*Another note. Hastily turns over papers, making brief notes, till he nears the bottom of the heap.*] Yes, yes. Well, that'll be enough. There's millions in it. I'll let you out now.

[*Walks to the door with key in one hand, the last paper in the other.*]

ALCHEMIST

Thank you, Master, thank you.

SIR ARTHUR

And your friend Hahalaba will find it hard to laugh over this deal, for I'm the richest man in England now.

ALCHEMIST

Not yet, Master.

SIR ARTHUR

Well, I soon will be.

[*Unlocks door.*]

ALCHEMIST

And Master. Read no more of these hidden things. It is surely enough. Tempt Hahalaba no further.

SIR ARTHUR

I won't. I've read all I want. I've enough knowledge to put against the brains of all the financiers in London.

ALCHEMIST

Then read no further, Master. Put it down.

SIR ARTHUR

That? Do you know what that is? That is to-day's paper. January 1st, 1929, the last of the heap. I shall read to-day's paper before I go to bed. We're in 1929 now. Well, good-bye, and a happy New Year.

ALCHEMIST

Farewell, Master.

[*Exit.* SIR ARTHUR returns to his chair *and settles down to the British habit of reading the day's* TIMES.]

SIR ARTHUR

Nothing of interest. Dull, I suppose, after the other. Hullo! What's this? What? What? But it can't be! But this is to-day's paper! But I'm alive! Good God. [*With breath coming short he goes to decanter of brandy, pours out, mixes, and drinks. He stands a little steadier, hand to heart now and then.*] Bit of shock that. Read that kind of thing. Silly Jugginses. Who can have been fool enough to invent a yarn like that? It's to-day's paper and I'm quite well. [*But the improvement was only momentary and he rings for* SNAGGS, *then he goes panting to the sofa and lies down.*] Bit of a . . . shock, that.

[*Enter* SNAGGS. *Goes to* SIR ARTHUR *on sofa. All the copies of the* TIMES *have vanished.*]

SNAGGS

Hullo. What's this has happened? [*Goes to table and sees* SIR ARTHUR'S *notes on half sheets.*] Patangas? Mexican Airways? Nothing to account for it there. [*Almost absently he crumples them and throws them in the fire; then turns to the business in hand.*] Now what should *I* do? [*A glance towards the sofa. Then he goes to the telephone.*] Ah, would you please give me the *Times*. I don't know the

number. Yes, the *Times* Office, please. Is that the *Times?* Oh, could I speak to the Editor? . . . Oh, well, perhaps he'd do. But it's important. . . . Tell him something sudden. . . . Oh, yes. I'm butler to Sir Arthur Strangways. Mr. Snaggs is *my* name. . . . Well, I thought you'd like to know Sir Arthur has just died. . . . Sudden like. . . . Yes. [*Leaving the 'phone, he passes the other table on which* ALCHEMIST *had put down his slip. He picks it up and reads.*] Aurelian for the Derby. *He's* no good.

CURTAIN